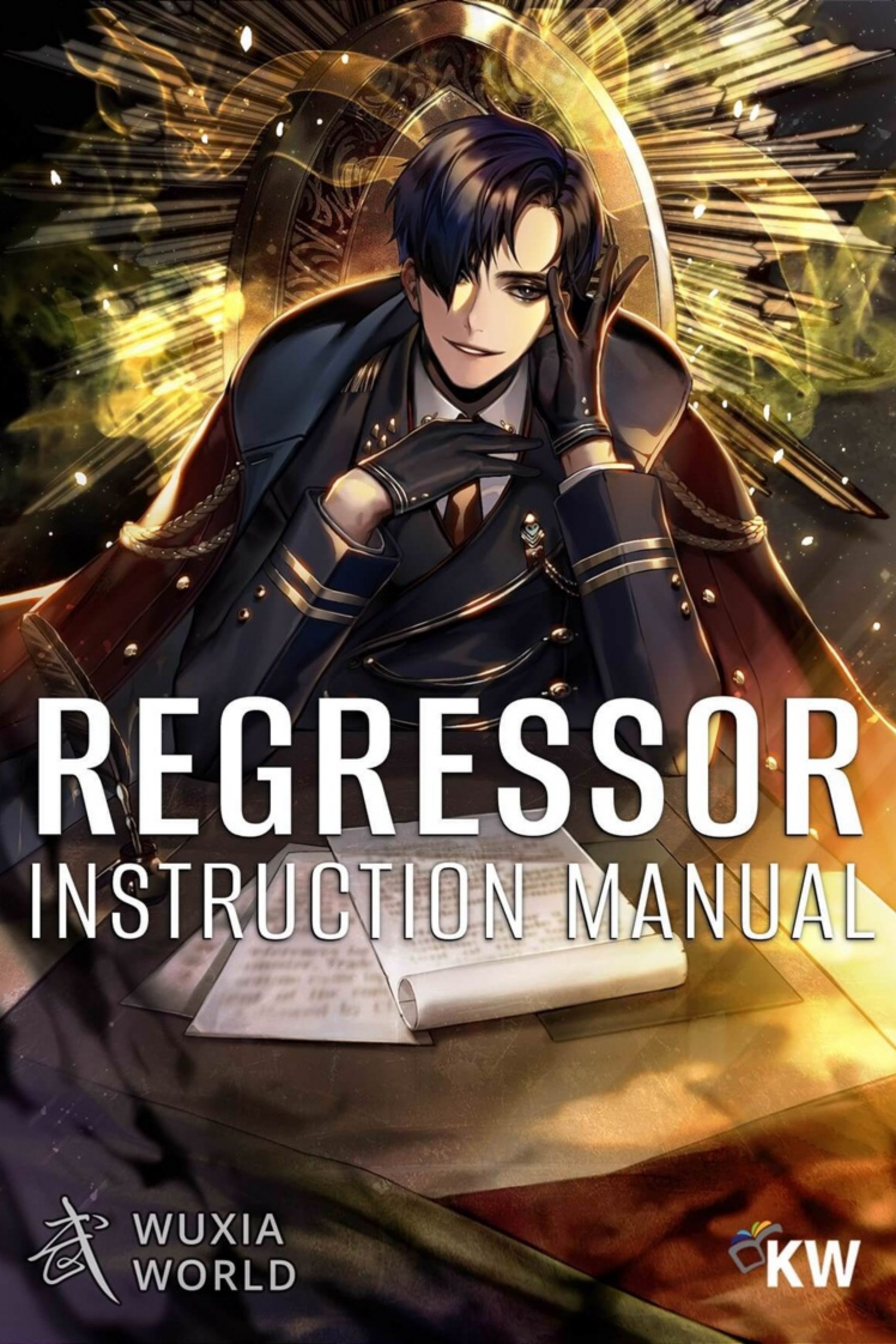
REGRESSOR
INSTRUCTION MANUAL
WUXIA WORLD
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REGRESSOR INSTRUCTION MANUAL

– 회귀자 사용설명서 –

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[WUXIAWORLD]

CHAPTER 1101
WOO HYO-YEOL (8)

"The rules of the mock battle are simple," the instructor said.

'It's capture the flag.'

"Basically, the team who grabs the other team's flag first wins. Of course, the mock battle will end once the entire team is incapacitated. We've previously announced the map, and the academy will provide the equipment to both the blue team and the red team.

"There are priests and instructors on standby to ensure that no one will die. The necklace you're wearing also contains a shield that will activate upon detecting a fatal attack. We ask that you never take it off," the instructor advised.

"The leader of each party will be…"

"Woo Hyo-Yeol," said the instructor, "and Han Sora."

"We'll decide which side each team will take through a coin flip," the instructor said.

"Sounds good."

'This doesn't seem like a simple academy event.'

The size of the mock battle was too big for the instructor to treat this as a casual event. Of course, considering the characteristics of Rohen, this was bound to happen. After all, events that were good at attracting attention were…

'They're also good at grabbing the higher-ups' attention.'

Both the capital and the people would gather, and if major familias appeared as well, then the academy couldn't make this a quick and casual event. The reason they invited the other academy was probably to combine their funds.

The lousy training ground was replaced by a battlefield that was just perfect. It was based on Rohen's topograph, and objects such as trees and buildings were there as well. The replication was so good that I was worried that the workers would start foaming at the mouth due to the sheer workload.

Among them, Han Sora and Woo Hyo-Yeol were looking at each other.

I was sure the guy who wanted to call Woo Hyo-Yeol over at the time had been wanting to witness this sight.

'They do look pretty cool.'

The battle between the academy's best fighters was always exciting, and they had brought their party as well.

'The viewership is bound to go up.'

Woo Hyo-Yeol was looking down on Han Sora, and she wasn't all that different either.

The way she looked up at him showed how serious she was about this thing.

There was no need to talk about Han Sora's stats. Even on the continent, she was one of the top ten mages, and I was sure she was in the top three among the black mages. Sadly, her biggest weakness was her lack of actual experience.

'She has no reason to fight.'

Han Sora was always excluded from the quarterly expeditions of the Blue Guild. Alps and Shiro had been going on expeditions under the guild's name, so it could easily be deduced just how special Han Sora's case was.

Her main job was to use a devastating, strategic spell once and then go back home.

She'd either draw a giant magic circle with Jung Ha-Yan or cast a devastating, strategic spell with her. In some ways, it was an efficient way of handling things. After all, there was no need for a mage to be at the frontline.

Jung Ha-Yan was beyond the level of needing to be protected by the vanguards to cast her spells. If she were to use her Teleport, she could send her spells to wherever the enemy was located.

'That's why she has no reason to go on an expedition.'

She had raided a few dungeons when she was younger, but that was it. Of course, I was not questioning Han Sora's abilities here. If her opponent were an ordinary opponent, then I wouldn't be worried.

When thinking about the time she worked as a secretary, she was a pretty good tactician, but…

"Her opponent might not like it," I mumbled.

Woo Hyo-Yeol was a jerk, but he was still a regressor. His experience was on the same level as Kim Hyun-Sung's, and he could make good use of his experience. His weakness was that he had never played the role of a leader, and if possible, I wanted him to be distracted or go about this casually… but I knew he wasn't that type of person.

He disliked talking to other people, so I was sure his party hadn't done any special training with him, but he at least seemed to know what kind of people his members were and what they were capable of.

The baton wasn't in Woo Hyo-Yeol's hands, and they were probably treating him like a free agent.

While I was tapping my thigh, I heard a voice. "What do you think, Mr. Lee Ki-Young?"

"*Ah!* You're here, Mr. William," I greeted.

It was Will, and I had been seeing this man more often than not recently. He sat next to him with his usual smile.

"I'm sorry for being late. I had some work I needed to catch up on…" William informed me.

"You're right on time. I was just early. Actually, I think you got here really early. Anyway, Mr. William, I came because I was invited, but is it really… okay for me to sit here?" I asked.

"Of course. We're just sitting in a different area. I already notified the academy, so you don't have to worry so much," William reassured me.

'This guy is pretty cunning.'

There was a huge audience, and there were many members of familias here. The fact that I was sitting with the Flower and Fertility Familia was basically a declaration. It was a declaration, saying that the Flower and Fertility Familia had their eyes on me.

If possible, I'd avoid situations like this whenever I was in public, but…

'It's really uncomfortable sitting as an academy student.'

And by staying here, I'd get what I wanted…

"Is there anything you need?" William asked.

"Could I get a cup of coffee?" I requested.

"Sure."

I saw Will signaling a staff member of the Flower and Fertility Familia.

A few seconds later, a cup of coffee appeared before me.

“Thank you, Celt,” I said.

“It’s nothing, Mr. Lee Ki-Young,” Celt replied.

On top of that, it was delicious. The seats were comfy, and if I wanted snacks, I could order them.

“*Ah!* Come to think of it, I didn’t answer your question earlier,” I said.

“Right.”

“You asked what I thought about this mock battle, right?” I asked.

“That’s right,” he replied.

“What do you think, Mr. William?” I asked.

“I’m actually betting on Woo Hyo-Yeol,” William answered.

“*Ah…* just as I expected,” I commented.

“Yes. I don’t know much about Han Sora, but I know Woo Hyo-Yeol very well. He has reached a level that one won’t normally find on someone Level 3. Since many people will be watching, he probably won’t show his full potential, but…” William paused.

“Despite that, you’re betting on Woo Hyo-Yeol,” I said.

“That’s right. What about you…” William asked.

“*Ah*, I’m half and half, but…” I paused.

‘I honestly want to cheer for Han Sora.’

I felt like she had a good chance of winning, but her party members probably wouldn’t be able to keep up with her. No matter how many theories or tactics they had in their heads, they had to execute those, or they would be useless.

There was a huge difference between them and me, who could check the experience, stats, and nature of the chess pieces in real time. In addition, if there was an idiot in the party, the tower they had worked so hard to build would certainly collapse.

'That Christian guy is that idiot.'

"I'm kind of worried about number fourteen," I told him.

"Number fourteen is… Christian Pablo," William said.

"I can tell that he's nervous…" I pointed out.

Since my appearance, Christian had been worried that I would take his place. It was clear that he was going to do something extreme just to receive Han Sora noona's love.

If their front line ended up failing, then the mages would have to fight the warriors.

I was sure Han Sora was feeling the pressure. Her stats were nerfed, after all.

As expected, I saw Christian making bold moves in the mock battle, which was previously going well.

"…"

'I knew that was going to happen.'

I wonder how many people knew that 14 would deny orders. He was like a dull note in a well-harmonized harmony. His greed led him to encounter Woo Hyo-Yeol even though Han Sora wanted to avoid battles where she couldn't provide any backup.

"Are you Woo Hyo-Yeol?" Christian asked.

"Who's this idiot?" Woo Hyo-Yeol insulted.

"*Aaaaah!*"

I understood his loyalty toward Han Sora, and I understood that he wanted to serve the head of their enemy to Han Sora, but he collapsed on the ground before Woo Hyo-Yeol could finish his attack.

Han Sora gnashed her teeth and made a move. Her party members moved together and attacked while stopping the opposing party. She unleashed ranged attacks using her overwhelming magic while avoiding situations that could lead her to fight Woo Hyo-Yeol head-on.

She was displaying an incomprehensible level of skill.

Boooooooooom!!!

"*Aaaargh!!*"

"What the?! What was that just now?!"

When Han Sora unleashed her spell, I saw the opponent flying in the air.

This sight had to have shattered the people of Rohen's opinion about magic. I was sure of that, as the familias specializing in magic looked at Han Sora with interested eyes. Of course, William's reaction wasn't all that different.

"As I expected… she's a genius," William commented.

'Actually, she's not a genius.'

However, Han Sora was such a hard worker that it would surprise even Jo Hye-Jin.

If magic wasn't working out, she'd use alchemy, and if that wasn't working out, then she'd turn to black magic.

In other words, Han Sora wasn't the type to give up easily.

Even when she was extremely busy, she hadn't put down her grimore. Even when she felt like giving up everything, she persisted. Even when she had lost her vanguards and had to face Woo Hyo-Yeol…

"A summoned beast?" I questioned.

"*Huh*. It's a high-level summoned beast, but… it hasn't been that long since she exited the tutorial dungeon…" William mumbled.

"She just did triple casting, right? I know it's not a complicated spell, but…" I paused.

"…"

"How many mages on Rohen are capable of triple-casting?" I asked.

"Less than ten," William answered.

'She's fighting well.'

Woo Hyo-Yeol frowned at the sight. I was sure he wanted to have a clean victory, but it was hard to overcome the large summoned beast and spells that were getting in his way.

Under normal circumstances, it would be easy for him to defeat a mage—no, the victor was supposed to have been decided within ten seconds after their encounter. However, it had been four minutes since the battle started, and the mock battle ended when Han Sora ran out of mana.

Han Sora looked upset. She was angry, and I could see that by the fact that she slammed her fist on the ground with gnashed teeth.

Woo Hyo-Yeol returned to the waiting room, and I heard a loud round of applause.

"It was a good battle, and the familias here also had a lot to learn. It happened just like you said…" William said.

"…"

"In three hours…" he paused.

"That's right. I should get ready for the preliminaries. Thank you very much for inviting me today, Mr. William," I said.

"It was nothing. I'm really grateful that you accepted my invitation. Well…" William paused.

"…"

"I'll be cheering for you," William continued.

'Is there really a need to cheer for me? The result is obvious.

'It's pretty annoying participating in a mock battle with a bunch of extras. I didn't want to show my full potential. If I give them a taste, wouldn't that be enough to get them excited?'

"…"

"…"

Soon, I heard the instructor, and he sounded shocked as he announced, "Group A of the northern academy… is the winner."

"…"

"T-T-The finals will take place tomorrow at the same time…" he announced.

"…"

"Trainee Lee Ki-Young… is the leader of the winning group!" he exclaimed.

Unlike the mock battle between Han Sora and Woo Hyo-Yeol, the audience members were quiet. They couldn't understand what they had seen just now, and even William's jaw dropped to the ground.

Someone mumbled, and it sounded particularly loud.

“How…”

“…”

“How… did she do that?”

CHAPTER 1102
WOO HYO-YEOL (9)

'I knew... she was going to lose.'

There was nothing she could do. I[1] had no information about Lee Ki-Young, but I heard many rumors about him, and they weren't ridiculous rumors like how he and Han Sora were lovers back on Earth and had promised to be together here.

Lee Ki-Young became the champion of the mainstream dungeon, Beginner's Trial, by earning more than two hundred thousand points. Han Sora was in second place, and Woo Hyo-Yeol was in third place, even though she had beaten him by a mile.

Anyway, Flower and Fertility Familia had been trying to recruit Lee Ki-Young all this while. At first, I thought it was nothing more than a rumor, but I saw him watch the mock battle with the Flower and Fertility Familia, and I realized that the rumor was probably not just a rumor.

Not only was he talking to the leader of the familia, but the long-time staffers of the familia were serving him, and the sight made me think that Lee Ki-Young had to have long become a part of the Flower and Fertility Familia.

Basically, Lee Ki-Young had already been recognized for his worth.

Whatever tricks he had up his sleeve, the Flower and Fertility Familia had already acknowledged him. He had just recently cleared the tutorial dungeon and joined the academy, but he was already transforming the continent, so I wouldn't dare think that we could defeat him.

'Woo Hyo-Yeol and Han Sora.'

My confidence went down when I saw their mock battle.

Those two players were already on a different level.

It was a good example that showed how much influence one person's power could have on the battlefield. Even if that were the case, I was sure no one expected them to end the mock battle like this.

"It was all meaningless battle. Damn it," I mumbled.

I laughed bitterly at myself despite encouraging my party members to do their best before the mock battle started.

"…"

Earlier, the archer shouted that we would be rewarded with good results for our efforts as long as we tried our best, but now, they were at a loss for words.

It wasn't just the archer. The 50-something members stared at their hands in disbelief, but I was sure they weren't as shocked as me, as I had the baton for this mock battle.

I had accepted the baton, as I was a former military officer, but ironically, that was why I was confident. I understood how war worked through managing troops, military exercises, and various joint trainings.

Of course, I knew that war in modern times and on the Rohen Continent was different, but the basics of fighting battles using troops were the same.

In addition, there was a huge difference between being aware and unaware.

I needed to capitalize on that strength and fight, so I naturally made a lot of preparations. The moment they announced the map for the mock battle, I figured out the characteristics of the map and did endless research.

This was my own strength, and I had to make use of it, after all.

How I was going to place the troops and how efficiently we were going to defend the flag. Taking advantage of the enemy's position and how we were going to attack weren't exactly my strengths, but compared to ordinary players, I had an overwhelming amount of knowledge and experience.

My plan went awry when Han Sora and Woo Hyo-Yeol started fighting.

'The map changed.'

To be exact, the map hadn't changed, but the topography had changed.

Han Sora's summoned beast and spells had destroyed the buildings. Of course, she wasn't the only one doing so much destruction, but she was doing the majority of it. In fact, traces of her powerful mana lingered on all parts of the map.

The route I had been planning to take was blocked, but it soon opened up.

This battlefield was temporary, so it was expected that the terrain would change.

The small city was in utter ruins. The place we were going to use as our camp had disappeared, replaced with a huge wall. To make matters worse, the location where Woo Hyo-Yeol and Han Sora had fought became a clearing with nowhere to hide.

It was so badly destroyed that it became some sort of a restricted area. One thing that comforted me was that our opponent was in the same situation as us, but it felt like I was just being delusional.

[Luxury Haven in the Battlefield is comforting you by saying that you were unlucky.]

[Blade of Pure Green Light looks at you pitifully, saying that this mock battle is on a different level compared to you.]

No, it wasn't like that.

I could still remember the battle that happened a few minutes ago.

It happened a few minutes ago, yes, not a few hours ago.

“Move. Move!”

As soon as the mock battle started, we quickly moved to our positions.

The enemy then ambushed Squad 1.

“Squad 2 is requesting support! Squad 1 is in combat! Requesting support!”

“Provide magic support! Magic support!”

The enemy’s ranged magic attacks had incapacitated Squad 2.

I couldn’t understand where it was coming from—no, I was only guessing that the attack was magic-based, as Squad 2 had no idea where the attack was coming from. The enemy had no high-level mage, so I assumed the mage was within fifty meters.

“Are there any survivors in Squad 2? If there are, join Squad 3.”

“Joining now.”

I thought the enemy had already isolated Squad 1, and since Squad 2, who had come to support Squad 1, ended up falling for their trap, abandoning Squad 1 was a reasonable choice.

I was sure everyone thought the same.

“Squad 1 is still fighting! Requesting support! Requesting support!”

But this was a mock battle…

“Are you just going to abandon them, Gilmore?”

“Abandoning them is the reasonable choice here… but I’m not sure.”

“I’ll follow no matter what choice you make, but I don’t think this is right. You understand what I’m saying, right? Thinking about the people watching from up there…”

I wondered what the familias, who were watching from up there, were thinking right now. If they were in my shoes, would they prioritize their goals or their comrades? I was sure no one wanted to accept anyone capable of abandoning their comrades.

I knew this was a trap, but I had no choice but to fall for it.

I was sure those in my position would think the same way.

“Squad 1… is still fighting. We’re still fighting! Where’s the backup?!”

“Squad 1, retreat! Retreat!”

“We can’t retreat, damn it! The enemy is everywhere.”

“How many are there…”

“I can’t see! Damn it! All we can do is block their attacks!”

“Find a way to retreat! Move to position nine!”

We couldn’t go because we would all die. The enemy was bluffing so much that it was like they were advertising that it was a trap. Despite having enough power to annihilate Squad 1, they weren’t doing that for some reason.

Of course, I knew why they were doing that—they were trying to lure us out.

“Abandon Squad 1, and we’ll continue with the plan.”

“What?”

“It’s my choice. If you have issues with a familia after this, you can just put the

blame on me. If we help Squad 1, we're all going to die. It's a petty move. I'm sure everyone will think the same if they're in my shoes, Felix.

"I'm sure they're using tricks to take advantage of our emotions of not being able to abandon our comrades in front of the officials of the familias."

"I don't know anymore. Anyway, I trust you, Gilmore."

I thought the enemy's troops were focused on Squad 1, but even that was a trick.

"The enemy is heading for the flag."

The enemy had already reached the base. How? I still couldn't figure that out. How come they had already reached our flag?

"Damn it. I want Squad 5 to provide support! We have the upper hand when it comes to the number of troops. We'll head to the enemy's base as well by taking the shortest route possible."

The moment I gave that order, arrows rained down. The most shocking part was that I never figured out how many of them were there and who we were fighting. I had never seen the enemy, but my troops were getting eliminated.

Squad 1 kept saying that they were in combat, but they hadn't been doing anything about it. Squad 2 was wiped out on the way to help Squad 1. A huge chunk of Squad 3 was eliminated by arrows while trying to enter the enemy's base.

Squad 4 was eliminated along with Squad 3.

Squad 5 fought valiantly to protect the flag, but I still had no idea who they were fighting.

Squad 6 was ambushed from behind, and they were the only ones who saw the enemies' appearances.

Squad 7…

Squad 8…

Squad 9…

We couldn't do anything at all.

We were full of confidence earlier, but almost all of us couldn't do anything.

Only five people from the enemy team had shown themselves. Funnily enough, I saw Lee Ki-Young when the battle was reaching the end.

He was quietly walking through the ruined city. He was walking quietly with an elegant and dignified gait, and he looked so out of place that I couldn't quite describe him.

He walked with a smile, and his appearance looked so unrealistic that the title "Owner of the Flower and Fertility Familia" suited him.

Of course, he actually did something. He wasn't wielding a sword, nor was he preparing to fight. It was like he was sure that no enemy would ambush him or that no one was going to attack him in that clearing.

He had been strolling since the battle began. Just like that, he entered the enemy's empty base and grabbed the flag. He looked so natural picking up the flag as if he were a prince of a ruined country trying to usurp the throne.

It was just a flag, but he looked so elegant that I thought of absurd adjectives to describe him.

"Great job, everyone."

He said it as if his victory was predetermined.

"How is this possible?"

I knew it was possible, but that was the reason why I couldn't understand it. The map… he had memorized the entire map. He memorized the ever-changing map, and he knew in advance that there was a path they could take—a path unknown to us.

"This is unfair… damn it… T-This is… really unfair," I mumbled.

Was it realistic for someone to memorize the entire map while Han Sora and Woo Hyo-Yeol were changing it rapidly during their mock fight? To make matters even more absurd, he only had three hours to check the changed map, so was it even possible to come up with a new plan while memorizing the map for three hours?

Was he using a map hack or something?

"How… is that…"

How could he understand the map so perfectly that there weren't any variables at all?

How had he discovered places people could escape through or spaces his members could hide in? How was he able to move the flag without getting caught by anyone, and how was he so confident in his plan?

The man extended his hand out toward me with a smile.

"You did well, Mr. Gilmore."

The word "genius" wasn't enough to describe this monster.

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1. Gilmore's POV ☜

CHAPTER 1103
WOO HYO-YEOL (10)

"Sir," Han Sora said.

"What is it?" I[1] asked.

"They left," she said.

"*Huh?* What did you say?" I asked.

"Didn't you hear the news? The guys you did the mock battle with yesterday. Gilmore and some of his party members… eventually left the academy. After the mock battle, he stared off into the distance for hours… and then he submitted a request to leave before leaving on his own," Han Sora answered.

"*Ah*, the leader of the opposing party? He left just because of that? He just needs to think that this experience is part of life, and if he doesn't graduate from the academy, how is he going to survive this harsh continent of Rohen?" I questioned.

"Everyone in Squad 1 submitted a request to leave," Han Sora added.

"…"

Now I feel bad.

"…"

If I were in their position… '

It would be a traumatic experience for me as well.

They heard loud noises nonstop without having any idea about where the

spells and arrows were coming from. The guys reinforcing them were eliminated amidst their agonized screams. They didn't suffer any major injuries, but I had basically bullied them.

Of course, the audience was unaware of it, as they could see my bluff, but what Squad 1 had experienced was different.

They experienced a type of fear that was drastically different from what one could feel from Han Sora and Woo Hyo-Yeol. The summoned beast or the incomprehensible power Woo Hyo-Yeol possessed instilled a type of fear that they had never felt before.

One could say fear of the unknown was scarier than fear of something that could be seen. Some of them were still adapting, and I was sure just hearing the word "battle" was enough to make them feel nervous.

'But Gilmore seemed like he had the basics down.'

"And… you received over a hundred invitations so far," Han Sora said.

"*Hm…*"

"You're going to join the Flower and Fertility Familia, right?" Han Sora asked.

"Well, I've been thinking about it… but I haven't really thought about which familia to join…" I told her.

"Then should I not accept the other invitations?" Han Sora asked.

"Pick five places for me," I answered.

"Okay."

'She has a strong sense of pride as well.'

While we were doing our morning meeting, I noticed that Han Sora's eyes were swollen.

'She must have thought that it was really unfair.'

I could tell that she cried last night. She was pretending like nothing happened, but who would be happy about losing? She lost at the last moment, so it was highly likely that she vented her anger by crying.

"But… don't worry too much, Miss Sora," I said.

"What?"

"He's a regressor. I'm sure he had a trick up his sleeve. It's not strange for him to be strong… and it's because you lack experience in a real battle. I'm sure—"

"I'm not worried about it, sir," Han Sora interrupted me.

'Yeah, right.'

"It doesn't always go like you planned when you're on the battlefield. There's bound to be variables," I told her.

"…"

"…"

"…But things always go your way," Han Sora commented.

"It doesn't always go my way. It seems that way, but there are many flaws. Also, regarding Christian, it would have been a lot better if that idiot hadn't been in your party," I told her.

"I… won't deny it," Han Sora mumbled.

'He took it a little too far.'

"Anyway… aren't you worried?" Han Sora asked.

"Well, I'd like to crush him if I could…" I paused.

I couldn't say that it would be easy to do so. Of course, the basic template already gave me a huge advantage. If I were to use those annoying tactics, which annoyed me even with tactical Kim Hyun-Sung on the field, I would definitely have a massive advantage. I could also use what I learned from those mock battles with Jin Cheong.

The Regressor Instruction Manual wasn't even connected to Woo Hyo-Yeol.

It seemed like he could instinctively read that battlefield, but he was nothing more than a beast running around. The problem was that he was a huge beast, and I had no harpoon to use to hunt him.

"Isn't it better to have two useful resources?" Han Sora asked.

"Lim Cheong-Ha and Han Seung-Yoon are there—*Ah*, among the mages, there's one mage who received special training. But to be honest, they're not strong enough to face Woo Hyo-Yeol… If they use what they learned during training, they'll exchange a few moves before cowering, but I'm not even sure if they can do that.

"You were the same, Miss Sora. Didn't you also think that it's better to avoid an encounter with him?" I asked.

"That's right," Han Sora answered.

"I would've done the same thing," I said.

"So I didn't make the wrong choice," Han Sora said.

"Yeah, the wrong choice you made was not handling Christian properly. The rest was okay. I certainly thought you were going to win until the middle part of the battle. Anyway… *ahem*… isn't it time to head out?" I asked.

"Yes, you have to go and prepare. Make sure to encourage your party members," Han Sora reminded.

"Thank you for your hard work, Miss Sora," I said.

After nodding, I opened the door to the waiting room, and I heard voices everywhere.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young! I’m from the Slender Tentacle Familia!”

‘You guys can leave.’

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young! Do you have a moment to talk? I’m from the rising familia…”

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young! Mr. Lee Ki-Young!”

These recruiters filled the corridor that led to the stadium, and they were yelling nonstop. Things were out of control, but the members of the Flower and Fertility Familia were helping me, which was nice.

They stayed close to me as if they were my bodyguards, and they pushed the recruiters away, making them very reliable.

‘Maybe I should just join the Flower and Fertility Familia.’

While the recruiters were talking nonsense, my party members exited their waiting rooms.

“Ki-Young, I’ve been pretty upset recently. I know you were meeting your girlfriend… but how could you treat me like a third wheel?” Lim Cheong-Ha complained.

“It’s not like that, Cheong-Ha noona. Sora noona and I were just really close…” I told her.

“Is that true? I can trust you, right?” she asked.

“Of course, it’s true. You think I’m lying? Do you not trust me as well, hyung?” I asked.

“You’re the only one I trust,” Han Seung-Yoon replied.

“You said you were upset yesterday as well! You kept talking about how she was going to take Ki-Young away…” Lim Cheong-Ha revealed.

“When did I say that…” Han Seung-Yoon mumbled.

“You said that right after the mock battle,” Lim Cheong-Ha said.

We passed through the passageway while having a meaningless conversation. As soon as we appeared on the stage, I heard cheers.

“*Woooo!*”

‘Are they here to watch some sporting event?’

There were so many people that I couldn’t believe this mock battle was between rookie adventurers. I heard loud cheers everywhere as if they were cheering on their favorite team. The representatives of the major familias did the same and were applauding for the players.

I was sure they were just expressing their excitement. Obviously, the GENIUSES were excited as well, and it was to the point that someone could misunderstand this as some kind of mainstream event.

“Lee Ki-Young! I love you, Lee Ki-Young!”

“Ki-Young! This noona loves you a lot! Ki-Young!”

“Ki-Young!”

“Lee Ki-Young is a genius! He’s a nobleman!”

One’s image was paramount.

As soon as the mock battle started, I walked around the map as if I were taking a stroll, and the fans touched by the sight screamed at the top of their lungs.

It was only natural for me to receive attention, as this was a performance I had decided to include for the sake of ensuring that people would focus on me more than anyone else. The end result was perfect. Unlike Woo Hyo-Yeol, who couldn't achieve a clean victory, the ultimate winner of the quarterfinals was going to be me.

'I'm really popular.'

My elegant gait probably added to that. Who could have known that practicing to walk like a noble before the revolution of the Democratic Country would come in handy? My value had to be high, and of course, Woo Hyo-Yeol found this situation absurd.

As expected, he was looking at me.

I had no idea what he was thinking, but I had no energy to worry about him.

I needed to take care of my party.

"Are you all nervous?" I asked.

"H-How could we not be nervous, Ki-Young? I feel like my heart is going to burst… T-The atmosphere is so different from yesterday," Lim Cheong-Ha answered.

"You just need to apply the things you learned during training and do what you normally do," I reassured her.

"Easier said than done…" Lim Cheong-Ha commented.

"I told you this at the start, right? If you're not sure, just trust me," I reminded her.

I smiled brightly while looking at the 50-something party members.

"It's a mock battle anyway. It's a rite of passage we must go through if we're going to live on this continent as a player. We're not fighting actual enemies,

and we're not putting our lives in this battle. Think of this as a test to show everyone our potential," I said, acting with determination and energy.

I pretended to be an innocent child who had no idea that he was a genius.

I looked at everyone and cheered in an innocent way that made me appear as if the world had yet to corrupt me, and I was sure they noticed that.

My arm was also shaking timidly as I raised my clenched fist. I was only human. I was dragged to the Rohen Continent in my early twenties, and I still had no idea what was going on, but I had to fight people to show my worth.

I was also under immense pressure, as many people had high expectations of me. I also had the responsibility of taking care of my party members and leading them to victory.

They were probably questioning why I wasn't nervous as well as how a genius like me was always so confident and calm.

'That's… what everyone is probably thinking, right?'

'Right? They're sympathizing with me, right?'

"Cheong-Ha noona," I said.

"Yeah?"

"Seung-Yoon hyung," I said.

"Yeah."

"Merkel noona," I said.

"Y-Yeah, Ki-Young."

"Hirose hyung," I said.

"Yeah, kid?"

It was short but long. I called out the names of my party members. Of course, I had forgotten the names of some of them, but I activated Mind's Eye before calling out their names.

Everyone looked like they had the desire to achieve something—the desire to do something for me, as I had been working day and night for them. They had that kind of desire, right?

"You've all done well. My words might've been hard to believe, and despite not having any reason to follow me, I'm really grateful that you stuck with me," I said.

"Hey… don't say it like that. You're talking as if we're not going to see each other after the mock battle," Han Seung-Yoon said.

'Yes, that's right.'

"What?! No, that's not what I meant!" I denied it clumsily.

"It was a joke, kid. I know you won't abandon us. *Haha*. We should be the ones thanking you. I feel like you've been working hard recently because of us," Han Seung-Yoon laughed.

"Hyung…" I mumbled.

"Seung-Yoon oppa is right. We should be thanking you, not the other way around," Lim Cheong-Ha chimed in.

"Cheong-Ha noona," I mumbled.

"Thanks. I learned so much from you, and not just sword techniques. You taught me about life. You also taught me how to look at this continent in a positive way, and you taught me more… about myself as well," Hirose said.

"H-Hirose hyung," I stuttered.

"You're pretending to be calm, but we know you're the most anxious out of

all of us. We know how worried you've been about this mock battle. Do you really think that we won't notice? You can let go of some of that burden. A-At least this time… we'll fight for you," Hirose said.

"Y-You guys…" I mumbled.

I started crying, and everyone finally became one.

Their eagerness and determination were so passionate that I felt it burning in my heart.

'Their morale has increased.'

I felt like they could go beyond their limits under this kind of atmosphere.

"Don't cry, kid."

'Stop patting my head, damn it.'

"That thug that you're so worried about… Cheong-Ha and I will stop him even if it kills us," Han Seung-Yoon said.

Each and every member patted my head as if they were touching a lucky charm. As the clumsy genius, the only thing I could do in this touching situation… was lower my head.

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1. Lee Ki-Young's POV ☜

CHAPTER 1104
WOO HYO-YEOL (11)

'It's a good thing I caused that commotion yesterday.'

Based on the report I heard, I could tell they were nervous.

Woo Hyo-Yeol was looking around and hadn't been able to reach the path he was assigned, so I assumed that he wasn't used to the big stage. I was sure everyone had their own reason for being nervous, but my display of showmanship yesterday was what definitely made them feel nervous.

My performance had to have been *that* shocking to them.

Unlike their mock battle, which was nothing more than child's play, my mock battle yesterday was a good example of what people could do under a competent leader.

Some of the party members were eliminated, but our party dominated the match. I wonder what went through their heads when they saw me raise the enemy's flag just a few hours after the match began.

Some of them probably couldn't hide their nervousness.

'They haven't shown anything yet.'

This was a mock battle, but it was also a test for them.

Unfortunately, they had yet to show their potential.

'They don't even look like a team.'

Of course, they had been training together and devising plans together, so they were doing the bare minimum as a party.

After realizing that he wasn't really smart, Woo Hyo-Yeol passed the leader role to someone more fitting. His party members looked like they respected their new leader, but…

"I'm sure some of them will act impulsively," I said.

— You think so?

"Yes, because the first mock battle was between Sora noona and Woo Hyo-Yeol," I answered.

— *Hm…*

"As I mentioned before, our first goal is getting the flag. Woo Hyo-Yeol comes second," I reminded them.

— Do you know which path he's going to take?

"The path has already been decided. His goal is me, not the flag," I answered.

I heard the sound of weapons clashing in the distance.

— We're closing in on them now. We're surrounding the enemy's Squad 1. It's the same as yesterday.

"They'll probably head there. Hirose hyung, have you seen Woo Hyo-Yeol?" I asked.

— I'm looking for him right now.

"I'm canceling the operation, so retreat," I ordered.

—But we're almost…

"The operation has been canceled," I repeated.

— Got it.

“Xello noona,” I said.

— Yeah?

“I want you to go in. Hirose hyung, I want you to keep watching the target from afar. You have to maintain your distance so the target doesn’t see you. You can do it from afar, right?” I asked.

— I can. The target changed locations again. I think they’re moving to Point 11. They’re faster than I thought.

“Pull the target back out,” I ordered.

— Got it.

“You don’t have to fight him,” I added.

[The God of Sunset♥ says that you’re amazing.]

‘Of course, your hyung is amazing.’

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ is asking if you’re a genius. Of course, they’re aware that you’re a genius, but they’re crying out in admiration, saying how you can be *this* smart.]

‘Yeah, I know I’m amazing.’

— The target is getting farther away from the enemy’s Squad 1.

“Let’s continue with the operation,” I ordered.

— Okay.

‘One hand isn’t enough to cover the sky.’

I wasn’t watching the battlefield using my Telescope or a Goddess’ Mirror, but the communication artifact in my hand was enough for me to see the

battlefield as a whole.

Woo Hyo-Yeol was struggling in the middle of the battlefield, and I was sure that he was having a hard time making a decision. His initial goal was to get to me as fast as possible.

I was sure he planned to come straight for me or the flag.

And that was when he saw my party members…

Basically, this was a well-planned trap.

He probably thought that he could reach me, but that wasn't the case at all. This was designed so that his target was a few steps away, but he would miss them.

Jin Cheong often did something like this whenever we played that mock game. Whenever my allies pushed forward, he would keep putting down the bait, which would make his target take it despite knowing that it was bait.

"How does this work?" I asked.

"You want to know?" Jin Cheong asked.

"Not really. You don't have to tell me if you don't want to," I replied.

"*Haha! You idiot. I'll teach you. There isn't anything else like this out there. Anyway, this is the formula. If you can guess your target's Agility stats, it's easy to figure out the value of their movement speed. No matter which chess piece you use, their speed is set.*

"There can be variables once you start moving the pieces, but not getting caught is part of the formula," he explained.

"If the map isn't infinite, aren't you bound to get caught? Your troops are slower than Hyun-Sung's," I said.

“I’ll show you what I can do while your pieces are making useless moves,” Jin Cheong said.

Commander Jin was right, while Woo Hyo-Yeol was making useless moves…

“The target has taken the bait. Everyone, please move to the assigned point. You’ll have exactly five minutes to carry out this operation,” I ordered.

— Okay.

“Seung-Yoon hyung, is five minutes okay?” I asked.

Woo Hyo-Yeol would certainly capture Han Seung-Yoon by then.

“Hirose hyung,” I said.

— The target has taken the bait.

“Start.”

Woo Hyo-Yeol charged at Han Seung-Yoon’s party. In response, the allied troops moved in the opposite direction. It was a huge risk that required us to abandon one part of the frontline, but it was worth it because it meant that we could completely lose Woo Hyo-Yeol.

Unlike the other pieces, this piece was set up so that it would get caught.

It was a piece that we could sacrifice.

Of course, Woo Hyo-Yeol didn’t reject the bait. If the bait were someone else, I was sure Woo Hyo-Yeol wouldn’t really care, but the bait was Han Seung-Yoon.

There wasn’t anything in the plan that bothered me. Actually, there was one and it was the fact that I kept hearing Han Seung-Yoon’s voice after Woo Hyo-Yeol finally caught him.

— I wasn't abandoned, you idiot. My goal has always been to keep you here.

'Ah, take out your artifact. Please.'

— You jerk! You'll have to beat me to pass.

'Beat you?'

— I-I won't give up. *Pant… pant…* I'll keep you here for five minutes even if it means risking my life.

'…'

— Just a mock battle? You think I'm doing this for a mere mock battle? I'm paying Ki-Young back for his trust. A jerk like you… won't understand it. There's actually someone… out there who believes… in a useless person like me…

'This guy talks too much.'

— *Argh!* I'll never let go. Never! Ki-Young! I'll take care of this guy! Your trust! I'll pay you back no matter what!

He was dodging Woo Hyo-Yeol's fatal attacks by a hair's breadth.

Since he was still talking, it was clear that he was in the game. He probably had wounds all over, but he was protecting his neck and heart using his shield. He was even holding Woo Hyo-Yeol back by grabbing the hem of the latter's pants.

I even heard the others talking.

— L-Leave this place to me, Hirose.

— Xello, are you being serious?

— Yeah. This will be more efficient. I'm sure Ki-Young knows. He just hasn't

said anything because he feels bad about using us as pawns.

'Hold on. Why is everyone trying to sacrifice themselves? That's not part of the plan. Just follow the plan, and it will be over. I designed it so that everything will work out on its own if we just follow the plan.'

— I'll take care of this place by myself.

— Then I'll leave it to you, Xello.

"Xello noona! Don't do it! Don't!" I shouted.

— Ki-Young, I'm not stupid.

'You are, damn it! The troops behind us will take care of that. Why are you trying to handle it? Why are you trying to take a loss? We'll win even if you don't die.'

— *Ahhhhhhh!* Come at me!!! I'm right here!

— Let's go. Do not let Xello's sacrifice be in vain.

'Damn it.'

'It's over.'

— *Hyaaaaaaaaah!!!*

'This is really bad.'

— Come at me! Fight me!!! You bastards!!! Ki-Young! Are you listening? Are you listening to me?

"What are you doing, Ralph hyung? Get out of there!" I shouted.

— Hey, kid! *Haha*. I've been wanting to do this for a while. Thanks.

"No, Ralph hyung!" I exclaimed.

— It doesn't seem much… but I've always wanted to pay you back. With the way I'm feeling right now, I think I can actually risk my life for you. This may be a mock battle, but this is how I feel about you, kid.

— So what if I die in vain here and don't get any offers from the familias? Being loyal to you is more important than that. Repaying you for trusting in me is more important than anything else.

'No, you bastards! Stop sacrificing yourselves! All of you can live!'

These idiots couldn't understand the bigger picture.

They were putting a dent in the gear that was moving perfectly as planned.

Xello had to make the wheels turn while Ralph had to make the engine to complete this car, but these sacrifice-obsessed jerks couldn't understand their roles at all. They had only one thought in mind—sacrificing themselves.

— *Pant… pant…* it's not over yet, Woo Hyo-Yeol. You jerk. I-I-I can… do this… all day.

It had been three minutes since Han Seung-Yeon's operation started. I had no expectations of him holding out for five minutes, but he was determined to last that long despite the beatings.

— Of course, it hurts. I'm scared! Damn it! I know that I won't die… but there are holes in my arms and legs. How could I not be scared? B-But this is necessary! This is all for the sake of the person who has trust in me. There are times when I need to act like this. C-Come at me, Woo Hyo-Yeol, you jerk!!!

'It's all because of that bastard. I think Han Seung-Yoon gave the idea to the other members.'

I no longer had control over the battlefield, but I knew we had the upper hand.

Han Seung-Yoon was blocking Woo Hyo-Yeol, and the enemy troops were steadily decreasing thanks to the sacrifice-obsessed party members of mine. If it wasn't for their meaningless sacrifice, I would smile until the end. If all my troops were still alive until we fought Woo Hyo-Yeol, then we would achieve an ideal victory.

'Shit. It's over.'

Ralph, who was going to be a reliable meat shield along with Han Seung-Yoon, was crumbling down while taking care of the enemy troops. There was no need for him to do that, as the allied spells were going to reach them anyway.

Xello, who was supposed to keep Woo Hyo-Yeol at bay by shooting arrows from a distance, was eliminated along with the additional troops.

Those enemy troops were the reserve troops anyway. They weren't a threat to me, and they couldn't fight alongside Woo Hyo-Yeol. To make things worse, Hirose, our third ace, looked like he was about to sacrifice himself as well.

— Ki-Young.

"Hirose hyung! Just stop it, please! Stop!" I begged.

—…

'We're going to lose.'

"Seriously, don't do it! Hirose hyung!" I shouted.

— I knew you were going to say that. But you know…

There was no way to stop Woo Hyo-Yeol, who was returning with the flag. I knew from the start that it was going to be difficult to face him, but it seemed that I would have to face him without my useful pawns.

'This is really bad.'

Meanwhile…

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ has donated 10,000 coins.]

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ is moved to tears by the camaraderie you and your comrades have shown.]

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ is crying while watching you. Although it's just a mock battle, they collapse because of the dedication and friendship you and your comrades have shown.]

There was a commotion.

[The Wolf Crying Under the Crescent Moon is laughing, saying that this is ridiculous.]

I never imagined that I'd agree with that jerk.

[The God of Sunset♥ is nodding and saying that he would make the same choice if he were in their shoes.]

[The Slender Tentacle Queen♥ says that she doesn't mind if tentacles don't show up this time. She just hopes that your future will be filled with victory.]

I started questioning if they were doing all this to drive me crazy.

'We already lost. It's over, damn it.'

And that was when I received an unexpected message…

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ wants to help you.]

"*Huh?*"

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ wants to give you strength.]

"…"

[The God of Sunset♥ is worried.]

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ has donated 100,000 coins.]

[The God of Sunset♥ has donated 150,000 coins.]

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ wants to be your GENIUS. She wants to give strength and hope to you and your comrades.]

[The God of Sunset♥ also says that he can give you hope and strength. He says the Weapon of Sunset is ready…]

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ wants to make you the Saint of Flower and Fertility.]

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ wants to give you power.]

[The God of Sunset♥ is certain that you will never betray him. That you—]

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ wants to be your GENIUS.]

[GENIUS…]

"…"

[Would you like to change your GENIUS?]

"Y-Yes…" I stuttered.

[The God of Sunset♥ says !#$%BA!@!#%$&*@@!!@#$]

A giant beam of light engulfed me.

CHAPTER 1105
WOO HYO-YEOL (12)

I had always believed that rookies who had just cleared the tutorial dungeon wouldn't be able to show so much potential. I always believed in that until today. The mock battle before me was still ongoing. It was lasting longer than I thought.

I was sure everyone, including the small and major familias, felt the same way as me.

'Doesn't this mean that they're geniuses?'

"What… was I[1] doing right when I just graduated from the academy?"

As far as I could remember, I was just learning how to swing a sword at the time.

I was not saying that the academy was incompetent.

When the Rohen Continent started accepting players, they built academies and had made significant progress since then. Many familias and nations thought long and hard about the academy curriculums; they about how they could teach the players more efficiently and how they could help the players adapt to their new environment.

The more players were there in the mainstream, the higher their chances of survival would become, so it had to be done. Of course, it was an undeniable fact that the academy had no time to teach them everything, but despite that, the academy's education system was actually pretty effective.

From common knowledge about Rohen to combat and Rohen's culture, I knew that they were one of the reasons I got this far, so I definitely wasn't

belittling them.

The problem was the people obtaining the knowledge they had to offer.

Regardless of how good the academy's curriculum was, most of the players spent that one month trying to adjust. The only knowledge they had about swords and magic was from reading novels or watching movies.

The mock battle wasn't exactly what the trainees had imagined.

Han Sora and Woo Hyo-Yeol's powers were shocking, but Lee Ki-Young was the one who caught my attention. Actually, it was more like my attention was on the party he was leading.

'What in the world happened… to the players this year?'

"They have no hesitation at all."

"I know they won't die… but aren't they scared at all? They're rookies who have just arrived on the continent. What's with that move? How is that possible?"

If I had to exaggerate, it was like they were already seasoned fighters.

It wasn't a matter of whether they were strong or weak.

None of them acted like rookies. Whether they were swinging swords, casting spells, or pulling the strings of their bows, they were skilled with their weapons. They also seemed to have an understanding of what they were capable of doing, what they needed to do, and their limits.

'What kind of spell was cast on them?'

"Who's the academy instructor this year? In such a short time, you achieved—"

"If you're curious, I can tell you, Miss Choi Seol-Ah. I don't think it has

anything to do with the instructor or the academy's curriculum," they interrupted me.

"What? What are you saying? Actually… I think I understand what you're saying," I said.

Lee Ki-Young and the players working with him were the only ones moving like they weren't rookies.

"That's right. I assume it's because he's at the center of it."

"I can see it, but it's surprising. He looks so young. The fact that he's able to lead people so skillfully at that age… Has he perhaps attended a military academy before? He looks like an ordinary person, though." I asked.

"…"

"Actually, attending a military academy doesn't necessarily mean that one will have leadership skills. Some of the rookies were former soldiers. Anyway, how come he's so good at leading people?"

"There are even a few things that I can't quite understand. Isn't it funny? If what we're assuming is correct… then Lee Ki-Young has just turned the academy's curriculum useless, even though it was created by basically the entire continent," I said.

"That's one way of interpreting it," they commented.

"Has it only been one week? Are you telling me that he gathered all those people, convinced them to take his side, and trained with them all within a week? I just… can't… understand it… no matter how hard I try," I said.

"The only thing I can say about him is that he's a genius," they said.

"Woo Hyo-Yeol is a genius as well, and so is Han Sora. William of the Flower and Fertility Familia is also a genius… I'm embarrassed to say this, but I was called a genius as well.

“I’ve seen every genius out there, but it’s my first time seeing someone who seems so out of place with the title. Do you understand what I’m saying?” I asked.

“Yes, I think so,” they answered.

“It’s to the point that I’m questioning if he’s even human. What on earth do people like him think about? Anyway, do you know?” I asked.

“Know what? What do you mean?”

“I’m talking about how talented professional go players or chess players can play the game in their heads without looking at the board. When I first heard that, I thought it was just interesting, but look at that. Imagine that huge battlefield being inside someone’s small head,” I said.

“…”

“He doesn’t even know if things will work out according to his plan… but he’s still playing the game…” I added.

“…”

“Doesn’t it give you goosebumps? It’d be a waste if only humans got to witness that. I feel bad for the higher-ups, but I’m sure the great GENIUSES haven’t seen or heard of something like him. His talent is even more surprising than his innate talent for magic and the instincts of his body. Now that’s what you call a genius,” I said.

“…”

“I’m sure everyone watching this mock battle will realize that,” I added.

“What do you mean?” they asked.

“Whether he likes it or not, the Rohen Continent will do its best to accept him. Regardless of who takes him in, he will be at the center, and everything

will change because of him.

“The first trigger that will fix the mainstream, the war between nations, the struggle between familias, the battle against the demons, and every conflict imaginable will start from that man’s head,” I answered.

“I understand… but you’re…”

‘Overinterpreting it? I disagree. I definitely wasn’t overestimating him.’

‘He deserves that kind of treatment.’

I couldn’t help but think that way when I saw the battle starting in each zone. The last mock battle was pretty shocking, but this battle was also worth watching.

The troop’s movement, tactics, and combat styles—I still couldn’t quite understand them, but one thing I was sure of was that everything was going according to *his* plan.

Even though I couldn’t understand it, I had an idea of what was going on. If the higher-ups were watching this battle, then they’d see that one side was overwhelmingly ahead.

There was a difference in skills between each party member, but Woo Hyo-Yeol’s party could never defeat Lee Ki-Young’s party.

It could be a change in the terrain mid-battle, a difference in their field of view, or how the players were going about the fight, but unlike Lee Ki-Young, who was naturally leading his party, Woo Hyo-Yeol was being bogged down.

Lee Ki-Young’s side lit the fuse while the other side was busy trying to take care of the explosive.

Woo Hyo-Yeol was also surrounded by enemy troops, so he couldn’t move at all.

“That man is dedicated,” they said.

“Was his name Han Seung-Yoon?” I asked.

“Yes.”

“They must be pretty close,” I commented.

“That seems to be the case,” they said.

“Regardless of the result, I think we should recruit one of them. We may not be able to recruit Lee Ki-Young, so we should recruit one of the people he cherishes. I thought there might be hope, but…” I paused.

Just then, a large pillar of light descended.

“It looks like our GENIUS can’t convince that man to join our familia,” I commented.

“So he has chosen… his GENIUS,” they mumbled.

“That’s right.”

Everyone’s jaw, including mine, dropped as they looked at the pillar of light. I’m sure this wasn’t their first time seeing someone get chosen by a GENIUS, and it was actually a pretty common sight in Rohen.

For some reason, however, everyone stared at it with their mouths open.

‘Haaa… ‘

The faces of the audience members bothered me because some of them clearly looked upset. Choosing the same GENIUS as a familiar wouldn’t necessarily mean that one would end up in the same familia, but it was only natural for people serving the same GENIUS to stick together.

I was sure they were really upset because they had lost their chance to

recruit a talented player.

Even I was upset.

The Flower and Fertility Familia was different from us. William—famous for the fact that he rarely showed his emotions—was smiling brightly.

I could feel the Goddess of Flower and Fertility's unique energy, but William's delighted look basically confirmed for me that Lee Ki-Young had chosen the Goddess of Flower and Fertility as his GENIUS.

When the light went away…

'…'

I saw Lee Ki-Young standing in the middle of radiant lights.

"…"

I couldn't quite describe what he looked like.

The holy power blooming from him resembled hundreds of flowers that were in full bloom. A flower crown made out of platinum-colored lights was shining on top of his head, and it was so beautiful that even an angel's halo paled in comparison to it.

His eyes were sparkling, and there was an indescribable elegance in the way he walked. He looked so natural. He stretched his hand toward the incomprehensible light and touched them.

His actions looked so natural.

"O God…" I said unknowingly. I immediately shut my mouth, but I wasn't the only one who felt that way. I felt a sense of respect one would naturally feel upon witnessing something holy and sacred.

It was pure admiration one would feel when looking at a religious work of

art or a masterpiece.

When Lee Ki-Young gathered his hands quietly and started praying, the holy petals that spread throughout the entire battlefield healed the wounds of those who had sacrificed themselves for him.

I heard their confused voices, but soon, they realized that they were being protected. They looked around and smiled when they saw the petals of light in the wind.

It looked like a well-written script.

It was like everything was on a stage created just for him.

'AoE holy magic.'

Those who were about to lose consciousness started getting up.

I thought the winner had been decided a long time ago, but…

'There are no variables.'

It was to the point that I felt bad for the warrior named Woo Hyo-Yeol.

Unlike in the beginning when he was overflowing with confidence, he looked angry and was even frowning deeply.

Most of his party members had been eliminated. In addition to failing to defeat the enemy troops, their performance wasn't quite impressive either.

If they had somehow taken out some of Lee Ki-Young's key party, they would have had some hope of winning, but at this point, it was impossible to turn the tables.

He had lost.

His first mistake was not knowing that an ordinary warrior named Han

Seung-Yoon would get in his way.

I wonder what he was thinking. Could he have imagined that a warrior, whom he thought was beneath him, would hold onto him while withstanding his attacks?

Had he ever imagined that an "insignificant" warrior would behave that way?

Actually, had he even thought about the other players except Lee Ki-Young?

There was no way he ever considered the possibility that Han Seung-Yoon and the other members were talented as well. Of course, their stats were pretty low compared to Woo Hyo-Yeol's stats, so he probably thought that they were insignificant and that he could get rid of them in an instant.

The beastly man seemed like he was on his instincts, but he was being calculative.

So, what was missing from his calculations?

'Was it Lee Ki-Young being chosen by a GENIUS?'

Or was it the fact that Lee Ki-Young was smarter than he had expected?

I was sure there were countless variables Woo Hyo-Yeol could have considered.

"Except for a few variables, that is…" I mumbled.

Faith and trust.

"If you can't realize the difference between you and Lee Ki-Young, you can become a pawn, but you will never become a hero, Woo Hyo-Yeol," I said.

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1. Choi Seol-Ah's POV ☜

CHAPTER 1106
WOO HYO-YEOL (13)

'Incompetent fools.'

Incompetent and useless fools.

"They went down… without being able to endure it at all," I[1] complained.

I was sure that it was an easy task—protecting the flag for a certain period of time was a really easy task. Of course, I knew what Lee Ki-Young was capable of on a battlefield like this, but that was the reason I thought they could hold out.

If the stage were a smaller battlefield instead of a large battlefield like this, we could buy as much time as possible, even if we ended up losing.

The point of the game was to buy time; that was the only thing those incompetent fools needed to do. They just had to do that, and I could take care of the rest. Even if there was a difference in level among the troops, my allies had the defender's advantage.

The defender's advantage was more valuable than any other advantage, especially on this kind of battlefield.

'But they threw all of that down the drain.'

I wasn't expecting much from those incompetent fools, but I was surprised that my plan was ruined *this* badly. Of course, I had to admit that I had made some mistakes as well.

"A trap."

If one were to chase after it, it would run away; once one was close enough, it

would get farther away.

The enemy troops I had seen so far were nothing but bait to lure me out.

I was overwhelmingly faster, so I thought I could easily catch them, but it wasn't the case at all.

I had no idea what spell they cast on each other, but Lee Ki-Young had thrown a bait that I had no choice but to bite. Of course, Han Seung-Yoon's battered state was the highlight of this situation.

The Shield of Arhendel. He had an unusual nickname. He was the head of a familia that governed small and medium-sized cities located on the edge of the continent.

He was in charge of a small mainstream group, and he had a high reputation as a player. Although he was insignificant when compared to the entire continent, he was talented enough to make a name for himself.

Strictly speaking, he was a player with no connection to me, but I remembered him because we worked together for a short period of time in my past life.

Back then, he had yet to obtain his title, the Shield of Arhendel; he had just graduated from the academy, and he was wielding a large two-handed sword. He was a cold guy, and he was someone I couldn't really read.

I couldn't really call him a comrade, but I remembered creating a party with him, which ended pretty badly.

"Let's stop," Han Seung-Yoon suggested.

"..."

"There's no point in staying together anymore, Woo Hyo-Yeol," Han Seung-Yoon continued.

"…"

"You're too self-righteous. Everyone is having a hard time trying to keep up with you. I'm sure you can feel that the team is holding you back as well.

"I think it's best if we stop here for everyone's sake. It's better for you to play in the bigger leagues, and I'm sure you're aware of that as well," Han Seung-Yoon added.

"…"

"I haven't said anything until now, but you probably know it better than anyone," Han Seung-Yoon said.

"All right, let's do that," I agreed.

"I paid you a little more than usual. It should be enough to start a new life in the big city," Han Seung-Yoon said.

"I don't need it, you bastard," I told him.

That was it. I wasn't upset, and I wasn't feeling wronged as well. I wasn't the one disappointed, and I never thought of them as valuable comrades. They were just people I met temporarily.

When I met him again later on…

"It's been a while, Woo Hyo-Yeol," Han Seung-Yoon greeted.

"…"

"Back then—"

"Go away," I interrupted him.

"Yeah, I'm sorry," Han Seung-Yoon said.

I could still remember how I couldn't care less about his words, and his

apology didn't really sound like an apology. I had no idea why he had apologized or why he had even brought that up. At that time, his attempts to talk to me were bothersome.

It was meaningless communication in my eyes. In other words, there was nothing to gain from it.

We were completely different from each other. I was high up in the ranks while he was all the way down at the bottom. I heard the news of his death a few hours later, but I felt indifferent. After all, it happened on a huge battlefield, and he wasn't the only casualty.

Many people had died, and he just happened to be one of them.

'He's dead.' This was the only thought I had in mind upon hearing about his death.

Anyway, the Han Seung-Yoon that I remembered wasn't the type of person who would follow someone unconditionally.

He was more focused on hiding his feelings, and he had no trust in others at all. I wasn't insulting him by saying this. Just like every ordinary human being, he was cautious, doubtful, and wary of other people. He knew how to draw the line as well.

"What is that bastard so happy about?" I questioned.

Many things had changed, and it was all because of *him*.

"You shall not pass, Woo Hyo-Yeol," Han Seung-Yoon said.

"…"

"…"

"Yeah, you changed as well," I commented.

“What?”

What was her name again?

As far as I could remember, she was a famous player who enjoyed playing solo. Her job name was “Swordsman with Eleven Swords.”

I had no other encounters with her, but I knew she wandered around with blood all over her. There was even a ridiculous story about how there was so much blood on her swords that it looked like she was wielding crimson blades.

Her doll-like eyes… and the fact that she was calmly accepting her fate were things that I would never see on her face at the time.

‘I don’t like this.’

These feelings weren’t because of these rookies around me, nor was it because of the people blocking my path by shooting arrows and casting spells at me while thinking that they could beat me.

“These vermins…” I mumbled.

“Stop him! Hold on! Don’t let him cross over! He’s just one! He’s the only one left!”

“Hirose!”

“Yeah, I’m watching right now.”

I had a pretty great memory, but I didn’t want to use it.

There were a few people who caught my attention. I had seen them only a few times, and I couldn’t really remember much about them, but they had definitely changed. I was sure of that, as they all had the same expression as Han Seung-Yoon’s.

They were participating in this ridiculous mock battle as if they were putting their life on the line. They were moving as if they couldn't care less about the injuries that they could sustain.

Those who weren't getting much attention weren't being greedy.

The recruiters from those familias were watching, but they seemed to care more about completing their mission than showing off. Now that I thought about it, William had the same look as them, so I was sure he had changed as well.

'It's annoying.'

Arrows rained down wherever I went, and spells that could barely penetrate anti-magic barriers landed on wherever I was hiding. The vanguards' attacks weren't much of a threat. They were just annoying, and it bought them some time to move.

"Move! Move!"

"I won't let you pass, you bastard!"

"You're being annoying, you asshole."

The guy who stabbed my chest with his sword held his sword as tightly as possible. I had never seen this guy before, so I was sure that he was a nobody who died like a fool without making a name for himself in my past life.

I kicked him away, and he immediately rolled away. A wave of holy power engulfed him, and he got up immediately to grab the hem of my pants.

"Ki-Young!"

"Lee Ki-Young!"

"Ki-Young!"

They wouldn't stop shouting *his* name into their communication artifacts.

"Shit. This is fucking annoying," I mumbled.

"Stop him! Stop him!"

"Incompetent fools…"

"Hirose!"

"Yeah, I'll stop him," Hirose said.

"Who's stopping who?" I questioned.

"*Kgh…*"

"These naive fools… do you really think that incompetent fools like you can stop me just because I've been playing along?" I said.

The difference in our skills was big. The enemy's formations were designed with incomprehensible precision, but my instincts had already adapted.

It had been a few minutes since all this began, so one would be a fool if one still couldn't realize where the arrows were coming from, where the magic traps were set, and where the shield-wielding vanguards as well as the annoying spearmen were coming from.

"Just protect your necks, guys! You don't die anyway!"

"How long are you going to continue this ridiculous nonsense?! You think I'm going to keep playing around, you fools?!" I shouted.

"Don't worry, noona."

"…"

"You…" I said.

"…"

"You… Lee Ki-Young…" I mumbled.

I wanted to punch his face right now.

"…"

Unfortunately, it was impossible. The fact that he had come all the way here meant that our flag had already been taken away.

"The mock battle is over. The winning team is…"

I heard the announcer's voice and the crowd cheers.

"Ki-Young!"

"I knew we could do it! I told you we'd win!"

"Hyung… noona!" Lee Ki-Young shouted.

"*Haha!* You're a lucky charm!"

"What's that? You've been hiding that? Didn't you originally come here as a swordsman?"

"I just ended up being lucky… *hah*…"

Everyone ran to him and either hugged him or ruffled his hair.

There was a bustling scene similar to a festival before me, but screams soon followed it.

He was experiencing the consequences of casting such a massive AoE spell despite being incapable of housing so much holy power. In other words, he had gone beyond his limits and had collapsed to the ground as a result of it.

Lee Ki-Young was the one who collapsed to the ground, but I was the one

filled with a sense of defeat. I comforted myself by saying that this was nothing but child's play, but I wasn't used to losing. At this point, I had no choice but to accept it.

He was a threat, even to a regressor like me.

'Should I kill him?'

I seriously considered it.

The higher-ups said that he would be helpful even to me, but I couldn't rule out the possibility of him becoming an enemy who could get in my way.

He was an unknown variable to me, and I had no idea of what was going to happen to him in the future. The people who met him all ended up changing, including Han Seung-Yoon, William, and even those fools whose names were still unknown to me.

"What the hell… Woo Hyo-Yeol."

"…"

Just then, I realized that everyone around me was glaring at me.

I could feel their hostility as they held up their weapons. Their arms and legs were shaking, but they were prepared to fight me.

They were prepared to protect Lee Ki-Young, even if it meant risking their lives.

'I don't like this.'

He was a completely different person from me.

It was ridiculous, but in my eyes, Lee Ki-Young was shining brightly amidst the sea of people before me, and the sight made me think that perhaps… I had the supporting role, and he had the leading role.

“I hate this,” I mumbled.

“…”

“I… hate this,” I repeated.

* * *

“…”

“…”

“Woo Hyo-Yeol, you fool. You weren’t even that strong,” I said.

“…”

“Flower Ki-Young was pretty impactful. Right, Miss Sora?” I[2] asked.

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1. Woo Hyo-Yeol’s POV ☜

2. Lee Ki-Young’s POV ☜

CHAPTER 1107
WOO HYO-YEOL (14)

“Woo Hyo-Yeol, you idiot. You weren’t even that strong,” I said.

“…”

“Flower Ki-Young was really impactful. Don’t you agree, Miss Sora?” I asked.

“…”

“How are their reactions? Pretty good, right?” I asked.

“Of course. I never imagined you’d awakened at that moment. It’s like they’re certain you’re going to join the Flower and Fertility Familia… and I heard that quite a few familias had contacted them,” Han Sora answered.

“I knew it, but that’s funny. I don’t remember saying that I was going to join them,” I said.

“You’re not going to join them?” Han Sora asked.

“…”

“…”

“We’ll see,” I answered.

Taking the easiest path was the most advantageous thing to do, as starting off from a stable place would offset the disadvantages.

However, the problem was that there was no need for me to join them.

‘You’re bound to get power naturally.’

My life at the academy would end soon.

Han Sora had decided to follow her own path instead of joining a familia, so I wasn't worried about getting power anytime soon. It would take a few years, but I would create a familia that would make a name for itself on the continent.

Ha-Yan's presence would be enough for us to accumulate achievements, and with Han Sora's political knowledge, we would have a place in the heart of the continent.

Even without the Flower and Fertility Familia, we wouldn't have any problems working as a main familia in the mainstream. It would be better for us to have more allied familias for the sake of the future, but…

'It would be more advantageous.'

Serving the Goddess of Flower and Fertility as my GENIUS was a plus… and I could reach out to the other familias as well.

'Actually… would it be better to join one for now?'

I couldn't explain each and every advantage, but they were great. For now, I ought to—

"B-But sir," Han Sora said, interrupting my train of thought.

"…"

"Sir," Han Sora called out.

"Yes?" I answered.

"Did you ban the guild master?" Han Sora asked.

"…"

"…"

"…"

"The guild master… keeps asking me… for an unban," Han Sora informed me.

"I was going to unban him anyway," I told her.

"Please do it soon. The number of subscribed GENIUSES is decreasing because of him. I didn't want to tell you this, but he keeps spamming… and he donates only a few hundred coins, so it's kind of… a-annoying. He's in the way…" Han Sora complained.

'This girl.'

"Why is he bothering you? Don't worry. I'll make sure to warn him," I reassured her.

"Just unban him, please," Han Sora begged.

"…"

"…"

So he was still causing me trouble, and now, he was bothering Han Sora.

Han Sora's troubled look gave me an idea about what the God of Sunset was doing. If Han Sora's subscribers had ended up leaving because of him, then I was sure he was causing a big commotion.

'When is he going to grow up?'

"I'll do that," I told her.

"Please do it as fast as possible. It's really urgent. We're actually running out of coins because of the quest you gave… The guild master is driving me crazy. At this rate, our plan won't work out," Han Sora warned.

“I said I’ll take care of it as fast as possible,” I said.

“Don’t just say it. Do it right now. It’s all because of the God Sunset… We can’t keep him banned forever… Why is he bothering me? *Ugh*…” Han Sora complained.

‘She tends to get upset like this once in a while.’

“Anyway, you have to take care of this today,” she said.

“I said that I would,” I said.

“Th-Then I’ll head out now, sir,” Han Sora stuttered.

“Already?” I asked.

“Our academy is heading back. The mock battle is over, and there’s nothing else left to see… I’m only here because I managed to convince my instructor, but I should’ve joined the other members a long time ago,” Han Sora revealed.

“…”

“It’s not like we’re never going to see each other again. I’ll contact you often—”

“Have you decided on your starting point?” I interrupted her.

“I’m thinking about settling down in Arhendel for now,” Han Sora answered.

It was such a remote area.

“…”

Han Sora seemed to have deduced my thoughts because she hurriedly added, “It’s far from the central region, but I don’t think it’s a bad place. That region hasn’t been developed as well. There are hidden dungeons and undiscovered

monsters.

“I think it has great potential… and it’s also good that it’s not *that* far from the central region. From what I heard, they’re planning on building a road to the Bloody Abyss Canyon. They’ve only had discussions about it, though…”

“Wait, has it been confirmed?” I asked.

“What?”

“Has it been confirmed that they’re going to build a road to the Bloody Abyss Canyon? I’m sure there’s a reason why it’s still underdeveloped. What are you going to do if they don’t build that road? They don’t even have a warp gate over there. Open up the map,” I instructed her.

“O-Okay…”

“What were you thinking when you decided to settle down in Arhendel? I mean… there are dozens of places that are better than that place, so why Arhen? The familias there are—Actually, just hear me out…” I said.

‘…’

As soon as Han Sora opened her map, I saw her looking dismayed. Her eyes were shaking, and she seemed embarrassed because her face and neck had turned red.

Most importantly, she looked worried.

I was sure she thought hard and long about it, but I was already nagging at her before she could even execute her plan, so of course, she was feeling down.

She was clearly feeling ashamed.

‘No, no. There’s no need to go this far.’

She could finally do whatever she wanted. She was promised full support, and the decision was up to her as well.

She was already upset because she had ended up losing to Woo Hyo-Yeol, so I was sure my advice didn't sound like advice at all.

'It's better to stay quiet and just cheer her on.'

I was familiar with Han Sora's abilities, so I was sure she wouldn't mess things up, at the very least. If I simply gave her enough support, Arhendel wouldn't be a bad place to start out. Of course, there were much better places, but Han Sora definitely had a plan.

'No, I still don't like it, damn it.'

I knew this was out of my hands, but I still felt regretful.

'Just be a good boss, damn it.'

Since I had decided to leave it to Han Sora, I had no choice but to nod at her.

"Looking at the map…" I said.

"Yes?"

"It doesn't seem all that bad," I continued.

"What? R-Really?" Han Sora asked.

"It does have potential… Of course, the road to the Bloody Abyss Canyon is the top priority, but even if that never gets built, the region will still function as a bridge. When you consider the region's possible future advancements, this isn't a bad choice at all.

"Not bad… Miss Sora," I complimented her.

"*Ah…* th-thank you, sir. I'll do my best. I'll create the best result so that you

won't be disappointed," Han Sora said.

"You don't need to do that. You know that I trust you, right? Just act like you normally would. I know you're capable, Miss Sora. I know, and so does the Blue Guild. You won't achieve good results if you feel too burdened, so just relax," I told her.

"Okay! I'll do that," Han Sora said.

"So you're leaving?" I asked.

"Yes."

"See you later," I said.

"You too. Take care of yourself. I'll call you whenever something comes up. If you hear news about Miss Jung Ha-Yan—"

"Yeah, I'll let you know," I told her.

'She hasn't looked back at me once. That makes me sad.'

Left all alone, I sprawled out on my bed and closed my eyes.

Officially, I was still unconscious. As always, there was nothing wrong with my body, but the holy power was too much for my body to handle, leaving me utterly exhausted.

As expected, I heard voices as soon as Han Sora left me alone.

"He'll be okay, right?"

"The Flower and Fertility Familia has already told us that he's going to be okay. They said it's something similar to exhaustion, so I'm sure he'll recover soon."

"Aren't you worried?"

“Of course I am. I’m only acting like this because the Flower and Fertility Familia assured us that he’s going to be okay.

“If Ki-Young himself told us that he was okay, I would never believe him. I’d think that he’s hiding his true feelings again because he doesn’t want to make us worry. His complexion looked pretty good, too…

“Anyway…”

“What?”

“Is Ki-Young going to join the Flower and Fertility Familia?”

“That’s up to him to decide, but he probably will join them…”

“I thought we could keep working together. I guess I was the only one who thought that way.”

“Why are you trying to get in his way when he has a bright future? It’s better if we end things here. Ki-Young is better suited for the bigger leagues. I don’t know about you, but if he continues to hang out with someone like me, I’m sure the incident that happened during the mock battle will happen again.

“He probably wouldn’t have seen this side of me if I had treated him a little better.”

They entered my room at some point and chatted with each other.

It seemed that he had yet to fix that bad habit because I felt *him* ruffling my hair.

“He’s so naive and kind-hearted. If I were to ask him to leave the academy with me… he’d definitely say yes. This guy is just…”

“…”

“No, he might even make that suggestion first. I’m sure some of our party

members haven't received any offers. He'll probably want to take responsibility, even if no one is going to tell him to do something like that. He's going to do it out of pure kindness and a sense of responsibility, but we can't let that happen."

"You're right. He really is naive and kind-hearted. I'm worried… that our Ki-Young will get used by someone, and he won't even know it."

"I agree… We have to work hard as well so that we can be helpful to him someday. Who was the one that said it?"

"Say what?"

"That this little genius was going to change the Rohen Continent, and he might become a key figure in Rohen. I don't think it's unrealistic. You know the current situation in Rohen, right?

"Everyone only cares about looking after themselves. Despite the fact that the demons are right in front of them and the nations are still at war… the players only care about themselves."

"…"

"I'm not a genius or anything, but I was able to figure out one thing."

"…"

"This guy will influence the continent in a positive way. He'll be at the center of the Rohen Continent, and he will become our leader. He'll become a shelter where we can live just a little more comfortably in this crazy world. I'm sure of it."

"I want to say that you're being too emotional… but I really believe that's going to happen."

I heard them chuckle and walk away.

“…”

“…”

“What the?”

“…”

“…”

“Why are you here, Woo Hyo-Yeol?”

There was an uninvited guest.

CHAPTER 1108
WOO HYO-YEOL (15)

"Why are you here, Woo Hyo-Yeol?"

He was an uninvited guest, so of course, the two put their guards around him. It was really late, and I thought hard and long about why he was here, but I just couldn't think of any reason for him to come here.

Moments later, I heard his voice.

"What? Am I not allowed to be here?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"I'm not in the mood to play games, so answer me. Why are you here?"

I was "asleep," so I wasn't watching, but I could feel the tension between them.

Han Seung-Yoon's trembling voice told me how nervous he was right now. He sounded tense and anxious. I heard a *clatter*, so I assumed he was looking for his weapon. Woo Hyo-Yeol seemed like he didn't really care, but Han Seung-Yoon seemed like he was preparing for anything unexpected.

"…"

I was sure Lim Cheong-Ha wasn't all that different. She was probably really focused while glaring at Woo Hyo-Yeol.

'But why is this jerk here? Did he think the match was unfair?'

"You really have your guard up… How ridiculous," Woo Hyo-Yeol commented.

"I have no choice but to have my guard up after what you did at the mock battle. Don't you agree?" Han Seung-Yoon asked.

"*Haa.*"

"Only an idiot won't notice how hostile you're being right now. Let me ask you this, Woo Hyo-Yeol. Why in the world are you here? What's your goal? If my assumption is correct! You…"

Just as I expected, Lim Cheong-Ha sounded nervous as well.

"I don't know what kind of answer you're expecting. What is it you want to hear?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked them.

"…"

"If I told you that I came here to kill him, you think you could stop me?" Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

'Those two can't stop him.'

"You think you two losers can stop me? Try it. It should be fun," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

If Woo Hyo-Yeol was determined to kill me, then those two wouldn't be able to stop him. He was so close to me that he could reach me within seconds.

It wouldn't take long for Han Seung-Yoon and Lim Cheong-Ha to lose their lives.

The mock battle was markedly different from an actual battle, and they couldn't request reinforcements either. Lim Cheong-Ha and Han Seung-Yoon knew that better than anyone, as they had realized their limits during the last mock battle.

"W-We won't go down that easily, you bastard," Han Seung-Yoon stuttered.

"We at least have to…"

Of course, knowing their limits and having the determination to resist until

the end were two completely different stories. Those two had picked the wrong person to fight.

'Woo Hyo-Yeol is an idiot, but I don't think he'll come all the way here just to kill me.'

If he really wanted to kill me, he wouldn't have come in here like this.

Trying to sneak past the members of the Flower and Fertility Familia was hard enough, and the regressor's body wasn't exactly *complete*, so I was sure he wanted to avoid pushing his limits.

More importantly, he had no reason to kill me right now, but if he had any reason to kill me, I'd say that it was all because he was annoyed with me. He wasn't *that* stupid that he would take that big of a risk for a simple reason like that.

'A lot has changed, right? Is that what you're worried about?'

As a regressor, I was sure he was worried. An insignificant person like me was changing the future, after all.

The fact that I joined the Flower and Fertility Familia meant that William was going to take a path that was different from his first life.

It wasn't just William, though. I was sure the key students within the academy had changed drastically as well. A very small change could lead to larger consequences, and he had already experienced the consequences, so it was natural for him to be worried.

Just like how he was an uninvited guest to me, I was an uninvited guest to Woo Hyo-Yeol. I was an uninvited guest ruining everything he knew. Obviously, that wasn't enough for him to harm me. He had a reasonable side as well, and he had already realized that the future was changing.

It was too late to turn back.

Even if he managed to get rid of me, nothing would change.

I was also the one who was chosen to help him.

I certainly wasn't a potential enemy; I was more like a *potential* ally.

'You will never be able to kill me.'

That was why I couldn't help but question why he came here.

'Seriously, why is he here?'

'What business does he have with me that he made time to come all the way here?'

'Did he want to slap me or something?'

'Or did he just want to see my face?'

'Don't think this is over—did he come to say cliche lines like that?'

Or… had he come here to beg me to use my genius brain of mine and make use of him? The timing was kind of off, but I had to get up because I needed to end this awkward confrontation.

"He's my guest, hyung, noona," I said.

"Ki-Young," Han Seung-Yoon said.

"Y-You're up. Are you okay? How are you feeling?" Lim Cheong-Ha asked.

They both looked shocked.

"No, you shouldn't be up. Don't worry too much. We'll take care of this… somehow," Lim Cheong-Ha reassured me.

"She's right, Ki-Young. You just—"

“I’m okay, hyung, noona. Don’t worry too much,” I interrupted Han Seung-Yoon.

“What?”

“I’m sure he came all the way here because he wanted to talk to me. Do you mind… leaving us for a moment?” I asked.

“Are you serious?” Lim Cheong-Ha asked.

“Nothing will happen, I promise,” I reassured them.

“Ki-Young, I don’t think you’re aware yet… but that jerk… that jerk…”

“Hyung, nothing will happen. He’s not as bad… as you think. You really think he’s crazy enough to cause me harm here?” I questioned.

“You’re right…” Han Seung-Yoon answered.

There was a moment of silence.

“All right. You’re so stubborn. Let’s go, Cheong-Ha,” Han Seung-Yoon added.

“What? Are you kidding me?” Lim Cheong-Ha questioned.

“Ki-Young said nothing bad will happen, so I’m sure nothing will happen,” Han Seung-Yoon said.

Han Seung-Yoon walked quietly, but before leaving, he stared at Woo Hyo-Yeol and said, “I’m warning you. If you touch even one strand of his hair, I’ll never forgive you.”

It was a cliched line. Lim Cheong-Ha told me to call them if anything ended up happening before following after Han Seung-Yoon. Of course, she kept looking back. Clearly, she wasn’t exactly a fan of this.

‘So we meet again.’

As usual, Woo Hyo-Yeol walked arrogantly toward me, and as the patient, I just watched him. It looked like he was looking down at me. Unlike my assumption that he was going to get straight to the point, he was being hesitant, which was unlike him.

Just as I expected, I felt no hostility from him. He couldn't find the reason to kill me right here and right now. It was more like he was forcing himself to hold his tongue and not say anything.

'I wonder what he's going to say.'

There was no need for me to say anything. The awkward silence was bothering me, but I was supposed to hate him. He was self-righteous, reckless, and selfish. I was born to be kind-hearted, so I couldn't get along with someone like Woo Hyo-Yeol.

Like water and oil, we simply couldn't mix.

After a while, Woo Hyo-Yeol finally shattered the silence, asking, "Who are you?"

'What the? What is he trying to say? Is there something wrong with his communication skills?'

"Who the hell are you, Lee Ki-Young?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"What is it you want to hear?" I asked.

"Who… are you? How could you…"

'Ah, this bastard is so annoying.'

'What in the world is he trying to say?'

"I…" I paused.

"…"

“I came here to help you,” I continued.

‘I’ll start with the truth first and with a voice full of sincerity.’

“That’s all I can tell you. I don’t know what it is you want to say, but…” I paused again.

“…”

“I’m a player who was summoned to the Rohen Continent, and I got into a contract with some of the GENIUSES to help you. Information about you was limited, so I don’t know everything about you, but I have an idea about the kind of person you are,” I added.

“…”

“I haven’t heard exactly what I need to do to help you… but I’m your ally. That’s an undeniable fact. Do you have any other questions?” I asked.

Woo Hyo-Yeol frowned. Although he hadn’t said it, I knew this wasn’t the answer he wanted to hear from me. It was like he didn’t even know what he wanted to hear.

He wasn’t mad because he lost in the tutorial dungeon and the mock battle, and he clearly wasn’t here to vent his anger. Actually, it was like he wasn’t even sure why he was here in the first place.

‘Huh? Is this jerk serious?’

I had no idea, but he was confused.

‘Are you serious?! Damn it!’

I really didn’t know the reason, but I could tell he was unstable for some reason.

‘What the hell is going on?!’

'I'll just rush him. I don't know why, but I feel like I have to do this because I might not get a second chance to do so.'

How could I miss out on this opportunity when the wild dog that looked like it couldn't be tamed was wagging its tail before me?

"Do you have… any other questions?" I asked.

"…"

"…"

"…"

Was he wondering why I hated him? If he had a conscience, he would have known the reason, but perhaps I ought to set up the story first.

'All right, let's go with this one. I'm jealous of Woo Hyo-Yeol.'

'Nice.'

'Let's go with me being jealous of Woo Hyo-Yeol for having the things I couldn't have and his abilities. I despised him for using that power for the wrong reasons. I'll pretend that I hate and I'm jealous of the way he's living his life.'

'I'll add in a bonus.'

'Are you wondering why I wasn't in your first life? I'll answer that as well.'

"Are you… here to kill me?" I asked.

"…"

"If that's what you want… you should do it," I added.

"Because… Because I only have a few years to live," I told him.

It was a ridiculous truth that came out of nowhere.

However, it was a heartbreaking story that would pop into my head once in a while.

“What?”

“I have about… three years… no… two years left…” I said.

“…”

“Are you going to kill me?” I asked.

Flower Ki-Young, who was trying hard to smile, was withering away.

The roots of the flower with the most radiant petals were rotten and decayed.

“What did you say?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“I… don’t have much time left to live,” I answered.

“…”

“So even if you don’t like me, please bear with it for a few years,” I begged.

“…”

“Because I’m going to die anyway,” I added.

CHAPTER 1109
WOO HYO-YEOL (16)

Obviously, I didn't show much emotion because showing that I no longer had any regrets about life was the best thing to do here.

Flower Ki-Young, who was withering away, was talking about his death as if it were a normal topic of conversation. It meant that death was *that* close to me. I wasn't scared, nor was I depressed. I wasn't overly kind nor overly energetic to everyone.

Emptiness filled my gaze as I talked about death.

This was an emotion I would never show to others and to the people who trusted me. I was sick. My sickness couldn't be explained, but my insides were decaying. It was only for a moment, but Woo Hyo-Yeol seemed to have realized that fact.

"…"

"…"

Woo Hyo-Yeol's question was finally answered. He finally knew why I wasn't in his first life and why a person like me had failed to make a name for myself.

It was easy to figure out that the GENIUSES, who had turned him into a regressor, had decided to give me a bit more time in exchange for helping him.

He wasn't that stupid that he couldn't figure that out, and his interest in me had to have increased. In other words, he would eventually know the truth as long as he was sufficiently curious about me.

In this first life, I quietly accepted my death. He had no idea whether I died in the tutorial dungeon, in a small city, or on Earth before I was summoned, but my death was cold and lonely, akin to the harsh winter.

He would see that if he really looked into it.

'What was your ending like?'

What was Woo Hyo-Yeol thinking right before he died in his past life?

I had no idea what happened, but I thought it wasn't all that different from mine.

'He was probably better than Hyun-Sung. Hyun-Sung couldn't die nor live, and he ended up getting stuck on the continent by himself.'

However, I thought his death was a lonely one. I was sure no one saw him die, and no one was upset about it.

'Who would want to be friends with a guy with that kind of personality? Who would want to be with him right before he dies?'

Woo Hyo-Yeol wasn't the type to have comrades or work with someone in the first place, so I was sure he died on the battlefield somewhere while covered in his own blood. What was he thinking when he looked up at the sky while lying on the ground?

Actually, had he even closed his eyes before he died? Had he regretted his actions, or had he simply laughed dejectedly? Perhaps he was angry, which was why I wasn't expecting him to sympathize with me completely.

Even at a glance, the anti-social jerk before me was insensitive to other people's feelings. However, if he had an ounce of sympathy toward me and my situation…

'You'll sympathize with me, right?'

I was a pitiful person.

'You'll do that, right?'

'I don't have much time, so you pity me just a little bit, right? You won't feel right getting your hands dirty just to kill me, right?'

Perhaps it was just me, but it seemed like Woo Hyo-Yeol's eyes were shaking.

Finally, he broke the silence once more, asking, "So what?"

"…"

"Am I supposed to pity you?" Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

"…"

"Should I pity you just because you're dying? I don't really understand why you told me that," Woo Hyo-Yeol continued.

'He's a really big asshole, and when did I ask him for his pity?'

"…"

"…"

"Did I ever… ask for your sympathy?" I asked.

He was at a loss for words.

"…"

I hadn't asked for his pity, but the fact that he said something about it made me think that he was pitying me.

It seemed that every regressor out there had communication issues.

I had no idea about anything else, but Woo Hyo-Yeol wasn't used to this type

of psychological warfare. The only thing he was capable of doing in a normal conversation was to make provoking remarks, swear, ignore, and stay quiet.

"I never… asked for your pity, and I'm not expecting you to do that at all. Do you really think I told you that because…" I trailed off before asking, "I wanted your useless sympathy?"

"…"

"You think I'm begging for your sympathy… *haa*… I just wanted to tell you that you don't need to kill me. Although I'm not sure if you really came here to kill me…" I added.

"That's—"

"I honestly don't like you either," I interrupted him.

"…"

"I really don't like you," I said.

"…"

"Maybe it's because of you that I'm still alive… but I don't like you," I said.

"…"

My remaining life didn't belong to me.

It was more accurate to say that my remaining time was for the regressor of Rohen.

"I'm jealous of you," I confessed.

I didn't mind speaking frankly, as I was never the type to beat around the bush. I knew I needed to stay true to my current feelings so that I wouldn't have any regrets.

That was the kind of life I had been living so far…

“I’m jealous of the time you have and the things you can do,” I said.

Ordinary people wouldn’t be able to say things like this. Not even Woo Hyo-Yeol.

“When I look at you, it’s like Rohen… revolves around you,” I added.

“…”

“And I’m talking about everything,” I said.

It was only natural. He was the regressor, after all.

“I don’t like your attitude of thinking that things are predetermined. I also hate that confident look of yours and everything else about you. I-I’m probably jealous of you. No, I’m jealous, and that’s probably why I don’t like you,” I explained.

‘Confessing that you’re jealous of someone is hard, but I don’t mind admitting to it.’

“Why are you telling me this?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“Am I not allowed to tell you this?” I questioned.

“…”

“I just wanted to tell you,” I told him.

“…”

It felt like I instantly regained control of our conversation.

Woo Hyo-Yeol was glaring at me, but he said nothing. Actually, I wasn’t even sure whether he was glaring at me or not. This was irrational, and it confused him, but it was more effective than I thought.

One thing I was sure of was that he was even more confused.

Was he jealous of me as well? Was he envious of my popularity, or was he jealous of my talent?

I knew he was a self-centered jerk, but what would he think if someone had volunteered to play a supporting role for him?

I wasn't certain, but I was full of confidence.

He seemed like he moved as he pleased, but he couldn't say what I just told him if he were in my shoes.

In some ways, I was *freer* than Woo Hyo-Yeol.

I told him I was running out of time, but I was probably the one living out my life between us.

"I want to go for a walk," I said.

"…"

The withering Flower Ki-Young got up slowly, and of course, I didn't forget to stumble.

I thought Woo Hyo-Yeol would flinch, but the cold-hearted jerk wasn't worried that I would fall to the ground. However, I felt like he wanted to observe me a bit more because he agreed with my random suggestion.

He neither nodded nor said that he would come with me, but he started walking next to me.

It was late at night, and the night was quite atmospheric.

"I'm telling you just in case… but I don't need your help," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"I'm sure you don't," I said.

“And I never begged them to give me help, so I’m warning you. Don’t do anything—”

“This is something I must do. Regardless of how you feel, there’s nothing I can do about it,” I interrupted him.

“What exactly was the contract?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“I can’t tell you,” I answered.

“You—”

“It’s not that I don’t want to tell you. It’s more like I can’t. You should know, though,” I said.

“I see.”

Our communication wasn’t smooth, but we were talking, at the very least.

“What do you know?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“I don’t know anything at all,” I replied.

“Who did you sign a contract with?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“I can’t tell you that,” I answered.

“The goal… What’s the goal?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“It’s the one thing I’ve been telling you. My job is to help you. You have… a lot of doubts,” I told him.

I gave him a chance to resolve any personal questions he had in mind, but he wouldn’t get any valuable information, as our conversation wouldn’t reveal much.

He was only talking about the things he cared about, and I was doing the same. Since there was some distance between us, it felt like there was a huge

wall between us.

I wouldn't really call this a conversation but despite that…

'It's meaningful.'

One had to start somewhere, and this single step was a really impactful one.

'Is it time?'

I wasn't sure where this was headed, but I took a huge step, and we happened to be in the perfect location. It was quiet and atmospheric.

It seemed rushed, but I already started it, so I had to go all out.

There was a large balcony on the same floor as the hospital ward. There was a tree and a bench underneath it. The pitch-dark sky was more noticeable than usual. It was a gloomy sky where I couldn't see the stars or the moon.

It was an empty sky with nary a single ray of light.

"I like dark skies like this," I said.

"…"

"I enjoy looking at gloomy skies like this—lightless skies," I added.

It was pretty random, but it didn't matter because walking to this place with him was random in the first place. I was setting the mood, and I was looking at the sky while pretending to be sad, but it didn't matter whether he was listening to me or not because that was what my conversation with him was like.

To take a big step, provide a proper explanation, and see his face, I turned around, but a ridiculous sight unfolded before me.

'Where did he go?'

I couldn't find Woo Hyo-Yeol.

"*Huh?*"

"…"

"…"

'Shit, was I being too hasty?'

I didn't know the reason why, but…

'Did I take too big of a step?'

"…"

'Was I being too hasty?'

Woo Hyo-Yeol had left me behind in the middle of our walk.

CHAPTER 1110
WOO HYO-YEOL (17)

“This is the last time we’ll be together,” Han Seung-Yoon said.

“What do you mean this is our last time? This is only the beginning, hyung,” I argued.

“I knew you were going to say that… but we don’t know what the future has in store for us. And you’ll soon be living in a world that’s different from ours. You’ll probably forget us by then,” Han Seung-Yoon said.

“Seung-Yoon hyung, you’re teasing me right now, aren’t you? What’s with that face, noona? You don’t… agree with him, do you?” I asked.

“I’m not sure,” Lim Cheong-Ha answered.

“Come on, don’t be like this…” I said.

“I’m kidding, man. We know better than anyone that you won’t do that, *hehe*,” Lim Cheong-Ha said.

“Don’t ruffle my hair like that, noona. I’m not a kid. You too, hyung,” I said.

“It’s because we’re thankful, Ki-Young,” Lim Cheong-Ha said.

“What?”

“When I first entered the academy… Actually, when I found myself in the Beginner’s Trial, I had no idea how I was going to survive this place, but I managed to figure it out thanks to you, so, of course, I’m thankful.

“I received an offer from a major familia thanks to you,” Han Seung-Yoon explained.

'At least they're grateful.'

"I didn't do anything at all. You received an offer because they saw your potential," I said.

"That's not true," Han Seung-Yoon denied.

"What?"

"I mean, you could be right… but I think you influenced their decision somewhat," Han Seung-Yoon replied.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"Did you know, Ki-Young?" Lim Cheong-Ha chimed in, asking.

"Noona?"

"A graduation party at the academy is extremely rare. To be honest, a month-long training isn't *that* amazing for them to hold a party this big at the end of it. Normally, they'd just throw you out into the continent without holding a graduation party.

"According to the rumors, many major familias supported the academy financially so that they could hold this graduation party. Do you know who they're doing this for? The Flower and Fertility Familia is particularly—"

"It can't be…" I mumbled, interrupting her.

"All of our party members received offers from at least mid-sized familias. I think it's their way of saying they want to have some sort of connection with you.

"The same goes for this party. In some ways, this is bribery. The GENIUSES could have influenced them as well, but anyway, I think it's all thanks to you," Lim Cheong-Ha explained.

“You really think so?” I asked.

“Our Ki-Young is so smart but naive… This is what you call politics. You’re probably still too young to know. Our Ki-Young still doesn’t know the horrors of society~” Lim Cheong-Ha said.

“…”

“Look at him blushing, Seung-Yoon oppa,” Lim Cheong-Ha teased.

“Don’t tease him too much, Cheong-Ha. *Hahaha*,” Han Seung-Yoon said, laughing.

“I’m going to go check up on Hirose hyung and Xello noona,” I told them.

“No, don’t leave! You’re not upset, right? Ki-Young!” Han Seung-Yoon asked.

“I’m not upset,” I said.

“Wait, hold on, Ki-Young. I’m not trying to tease you. There’s something I want to ask you before you leave,” Han Seung-Yoon said.

“What?”

I pretended not to know, but I had an idea as to what they were going to ask.

“Regarding… that day,” Han Seung-Yoon said.

“Yes?”

“So, the day Woo Hyo-Yeol visited your room,” Han Seung-Yoon clarified.

“*Ahh*… that day,” I said.

“Isn’t it time you tell us what happened that day?” he asked.

‘That may be true, but you’re being too serious.’

“I really didn’t want to ask… but it’s been bothering me,” Han Seung-Yoon confessed.

I followed Han Seung-Yoon’s gaze and saw Woo Hyo-Yeol leaning against a pillar.

‘I want to know what happened.’

I had been thinking about it since then, but seeing him like that was making it harder for me to understand him. If he was really going to act like that…

‘Why did he even run away?’

I knew I was being too hasty at the time, but there wasn’t an issue with how things were going, and I was sure he felt that way as well. It wasn’t like we were having a drawn-out conversation while in tears.

Our conversation was pretty simple.

I was being considerate because he never had a deep conversation with another living human being.

I was worried that he had left the academy, but ironically, the mysterious jerk was still in the academy. Not only that, he even attended the party to congratulate the people graduating from the academy, so he became even more mysterious in my eyes.

He was trying to look cool while leaning on the pillar quietly. Not only did he not eat or drink, but he didn’t even socialize. The only thing he really did was look at me once in a while, so I understood why Han Seung-Yoon and Lim Cheong-Ha were worried.

“I don’t know why, but he keeps looking this way. It’s not just today… After that day, I keep getting the feeling that he’s been looking at you,” Han Seung-Yoon said.

“It’s nothing. We just… talked about the future… that’s all,” I reassured them.

“The future?” he asked.

“Yes, but I can’t tell you the details. It’s related to the GENIUSES… Anyway, it wasn’t that serious, so you don’t have to worry,” I said.

‘I get why they find it suspicious.’

It was all because Woo Hyo-Yeol wasn’t the type of person to join a party.

He was also around me while maintaining a certain distance at the same time. Why was he doing that?

“If you say it’s nothing, then I’m sure it’s nothing. *Wheeew,* I’m still worried. *Really* worried,” Han Seung-Yoon said.

“Why? Are you going to bring that up again?” I questioned.

“That’s right. Why the hell are you not going to join the Flower and Fertility Familia?” he asked.

“To be honest, the small city of Harizel is known to be safe. I worked with them and received support from them. Also, I made this choice myself, and you promised not to talk about whether my decision was right or not,” I reminded him.

“Yeah, and we said we’d follow you,” Han Seung-Yoon said.

“You two need to seize this opportunity. I also know someone in Harizel who will help me. You said the familias had funded this party, right? Do you not realize that I’m going to get paid more than that as an adventurer?

“You said I was going to live in a different world just now, so what are you so worried about?” I asked.

“*Whoo…”* Han Seung-Yoon sighed.

“Don’t worry too much. I’ll contact you often,” I reassured them.

“Yeah, you better.”

After finishing my conversation with them, I moved to talk to the others.

Woo Hyo-Yeol also moved to the second pillar and leaned on it. At a glance, it wasn’t noticeable, but for some reason, it bothered me.

I would feel a lot less frustrated if he approached me and talked to me.

‘What’s his goal?’

When looking at it on the surface level, it meant that he was still interested in me, so I was relieved about that. After all, my original goal was to put a leash on that guy somehow. His defeat at the hands of William was a bait that made him keep his eyes on me, but this time, it felt like he was keeping an eye on me.

In other words, we were observing each other.

I had no idea what he was thinking, and he would sometimes act in a strange way, so I couldn’t say that this was great.

‘No, at least he seems interested in me, so I shouldn’t think negatively about it.’

“Ki-Young! Over here!” Xello shouted.

“*Ah!* Xello noona,” I greeted.

“I heard the news. I heard you’re going to be working alone,” Xello said.

“I’m involved in a lot of things, so I’m not even sure if working alone is the right thing to do,” I told her.

“The small city of Harizel… That means you’ll be apart from most of the members. Don’t you think it’ll be better to work in a bigger city? That place is too—”

“It’s not that far. It’s one of the few small cities that has a warp gate connected to the central region,” I interrupted her.

‘More importantly, the city I’ve been planning to settle down in is nearby.’

“Hey, what’s wrong with him?” Xello asked.

“Who?” I asked.

“Who? I’m talking about Woo Hyo-Yeol. Be careful, Ki-Young. He’s been acting kind of strange,” Xello warned.

If even Xello noticed him, then he was definitely not hiding his actions.

“It’s like he’s watching you,” Xello said.

“What?”

‘Yeah, that’s what it looks like, damn it.’

Was there something wrong with his personality settings? Perhaps he couldn’t really trust my words. I was trying to be as careful as possible, but the unexpected time limit on my life had to have opened something unknown to me.

He was a very distrustful guy, so I assumed he needed to check everything with his own eyes to feel better.

The party continued. Those who were drunk either returned to their rooms or fell to the ground and slept just like that, but despite that, Woo Hyo-Yeol was still leaning on a pillar.

“Ki-Young, about that day…”

“You’re really drunk. You should head back to your room, noona,” I suggested.

“What? I’m not drunk yet. I’m okay, Ki-Young. *Hiccup*. Let’s drink a little more…” Xello said.

“It’s okay. I’m going to start heading back. I have a lot to prepare for tomorrow,” I told her.

“*Ah. Ahhh…* R-Right… H-Hey, Ki-Young!” Xello shouted.

“Yes?”

“I-It’s nothing. I-I’ll come out tomorrow to see you off!” Xello shouted.

“Okay, noona. I’ll see you tomorrow,” I said.

It was natural for me to say goodbye to the people I made a connection with here and promise them to meet later. Of course, we’d say goodbye tomorrow as well, but I had to spend some time with my sad fans.

I was not sure whether I’d see them again, but some of them definitely looked useful.

I was finally alone as I started walking away.

One month was a long time for some and short for others. For some, this time was worthless, and for those running out of time, every second was valuable.

‘You’re watching, right?’

I couldn’t see Woo Hyo-Yeol anymore, but I was sure he was watching me somewhere.

I looked at the dark sky alone and started reminiscing about the memories I made with everyone. I walked into the empty training hall alone and started swinging my sword, but I soon ran out of breath and started panting.

I looked at my sword with regret while smiling bitterly.

For me, holding a sword was already a luxury.

I started coughing, and the excessively agonized coughing contained traces of blood.

I wasn't shocked to see it, as I was already used to the sight of it.

I knew I was dying.

Ironically, it was exactly because I was dying that I could love everything.

I visited the room I stayed in for a month, the memorable places I spent with kind-hearted people, the meeting room where I had arguments with the party members, the cafeteria where I sometimes complained about the food, and the training hall where I sweated a lot.

I reminisced about the connections I had made here to keep them in my heart and burn them into the retina of my eyes.

"…"

I was crying quietly, and I was sure someone was watching me as clear tears welled up in my eyes.

"…"

Just like that, my last day at the academy came to an end.

CHAPTER 1111
WOO HYO-YEOL (18)

Everyone was moving busily, and I saw people I spent time with at the academy among them. Some were talking while smiling, some were going around while frowning, and some seemed excited for some reason.

Based on their expressions, I could deduce who ended up getting recruited to a familia and who couldn't make it. I also saw people wandering around, hoping that they would get an offer, but unfortunately, there were no second chances.

People with potential had received offers a long time ago, so those who hadn't were mere second-rate adventurers.

'They'll die in a few months.'

The fate of some of these second-rate adventurers had been decided, and it was either they would die from starvation or die at the hands of a monster.

My time was limited, but their time was shorter than mine.

There were probably talented people whom the GENIUSES and the recruiters of the familias had yet to recruit, but they were definitely the minority. I was sure some people regretted not trying harder, but it was too late for regrets.

Of course, I didn't really care about them.

"Y-You have to keep in touch," Lim Cheong-Ha stuttered.

"How many times are you going to tell me that, Cheong-Ha noona? I'll stay in touch," I reassured her.

“You promise, right?” Lim Cheong-Ha asked.

“Of course,” I answered.

“Stop making him uncomfortable… and let’s just leave, Cheong-Ha. It’s time to let Ki-Young go. There are other people waiting to say goodbye to him,” Han Seung-Yoon said.

“But still…” Lim Cheong-Ha mumbled.

“I’m sure we’ll see each other again soon, noona,” I said.

‘We’re in the middle of a touching farewell.’

Despite the fact that we already said our farewell yesterday, I still grabbed their hand. I shook so many hands that my arm was in pain. Of course, it was also a pain to let these little kids approach me and mess my hair up, but I was crying as well.

‘That jerk might be watching from somewhere.’

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ hopes that your adventure is filled with happiness.]

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ has donated 10,000 coins.]

[The God of Sunset♥ congratulates the new graduates and applauds them.]

[The God of Sunset♥ has donated 20,000 coins.]

[The God of Sunset♥ says that he has finally created a new job. It’s called the Saint of Sunset, and it’s a priest-type job that uses the sunset’s holy power… The possibilities and potential are so enormous that you can’t even begin to imagine it.]

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ has donated 10,000 coins.]

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ really respects the friendship you have shown with your academy classmates as well as your creativity and energy in making the impossible possible. They mumble that although your start isn't a strong one, they believe you'll become the light of Rohen someday.]

[The Crooked Guardian says that you've made a pathetic choice. They're warning you, saying that you'll someday regret not joining the Flower and Fertility Familia.]

[The Slender Tentacle Queen♥ hopes that you don't forget where you started.]

'There's also these guys.'

I was sure Woo Hyo-Yeol was somewhere staring at me, as I couldn't see him near the warp gate.

I wanted to spend more time reflecting, but I had no time to do that.

Han Seung-Yoon was right; there was a line of people waiting to say goodbye to me.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young," William greeted.

"*Ah!* Mr. William. You're here…" I greeted back.

"…"

"You really didn't need to come all the way here…" I said.

"We're a family serving one god. It's only natural that I come," William said.

"Well, when you say it like that… Rejecting such a good offer keeps bothering me," I confessed.

"It's fine. The goddess also told me to respect your decisions because you might have a plan of your own. I would be really happy if you joined the

Family and Fertility Familia, but that's just me being greedy. I heard you're heading to Harizel," William said.

"That's right," I confirmed.

"I spoke to the main familia there—"

"*Ah!* You didn't need to do that," I interrupted him.

"I hope you'll take it as a gesture of goodwill," William said.

"What? Well… I mean…" I mumbled.

"Under the condition that you'll someday visit the Family and Fertility Familia's house," William added.

"W-Well, when you put it like that… guess I have no choice," I agreed. I could still remember how upset he looked when I rejected his offer, but it was a good thing that it didn't last long.

The fact that he was already congratulating me while smiling brightly told me that…

'He's really something.'

I *did* think that it was a shame. If I trained him well, I could transform him into someone a bit useful to me, even if he couldn't be on the same level as Kim Hyun-Sung.

'No, I promised to focus on Woo Hyo-Yeol.'

Our conversation ended, and I heard another voice. When I looked over, I saw the master of the Slender Tentacle Queen Familia along with her adjutant. She was walking through the academy in a slightly provocative outfit, but it made her look more dangerous than obscene.

"You have to visit our familia as well, cute little genius commander."

"*Ah!* Sure. I'll make sure to visit—"

"*Hehe*. This is a small bribe from our familia. It should be enough to start your new life," the master said.

"Master! Please stop. Can't you see that Mr. Lee Ki-Young is flustered? You're too close to him. It's rude!" her adjutant shouted.

"*Aww*, how cute. So our innocent commander is embarrassed?" the master remarked.

'I keep thinking about him *because she keeps calling me "Commander."'*

"That's enough. I will not allow you to get any closer to Mr. Lee Ki-Young," William joined in.

"William, must you act like this here? It's not like the genius commander has agreed to join your familia… I don't think you have the right to stop him from accepting my graduation present," the master remarked.

"Your existence itself—"

"You're too serious, and that's why you're not popular," she interrupted William.

'I should visit the Slender Tentacle Queen Familia when I have time.'

"Anyway…" the master paused.

"…"

"What happened to that rude brat, William?" she asked.

"…"

"As far as I know, the Flower and Fertility Familia sent an offer to Woo Hyo-Yeol," the master added.

"…"

"…"

"We got rejected," William revealed.

"The Flower and Fertility Familia getting rejected twice is a rare sight," the master commented.

'Will, so you did send an offer to Woo Hyo-Yeol. Were you… going to try to fix him?'

"I definitely thought he had potential. The goddess seemed displeased… but I thought I could change him. From what I heard, he rejected all the offers from other major familias," William informed us.

"At least he has guts. *Ah!* That wasn't directed at you, my genius commander. It's true that both of you are going to start on your own, but he'll start without any other support," the master remarked.

"*Ah…*"

"I didn't hear where he was going, and he didn't seem like he wanted to talk about it in the first place… Wherever he goes, I'm sure he'll be just fine," William said.

"That's a nice review from someone like you." the master pointed out.

"I don't exactly know what it is, but something about him has changed," William said.

"What?"

"I'm talking about Woo Hyo-Yeol," William clarified.

"*Hmm…* he doesn't seem like someone who would change that easily… The moment you think people like him had changed, they'd backstab you in the

back," the master said.

'She's right.'

"Well, we'll see about that. Anyway… I'll excuse myself here, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," William said.

"*Oh*, sure… Mr. William."

"I hope—"

"Yes, I'm really grateful," I told him.

"He rejected all offers… so I don't understand why he's still here," the master commented.

"What?"

"Woo Hyo-Yeol, our genius commander. He's been hanging around the warp gate. It's not like there's anyone who'll come and say goodbye to him, and he doesn't have any plans as well…" the master explained.

"*Ah…*"

'Maybe he hasn't decided on his destination yet.'

I thought maybe he had no idea where to start, but…

'I don't think he's that stupid.'

Of course, not everyone was the type to plan things out thoroughly.

I was sure he hadn't memorized every single thing that happened in his first life, but it was highly likely that he remembered when and where an incident had occurred.

He definitely knew where his enemies were, where the hidden pieces were, and where the butterfly effect would start. Of course, my sudden appearance

had changed the continent, but it wasn't like those hidden pieces were going anywhere.

'Is it… because of me?'

Was there something else he needed to talk to me about? Was he thinking that he needed to observe the foreigner a bit more? Was he still confused?

Honestly, my heartbreaking story wasn't enough to make an impact.

Of course, I couldn't rule out the possibility that it actually worked on him, but personally, I could guarantee that it hadn't worked on him.

Woo Hyo-Yeol obviously didn't pity me. He just met me, after all, so of course, he wouldn't feel anything upon hearing that I was going to die in just two short years.

'It's the same for me.'

It was none of his business whether the players he was seeing were going to die soon or not. My story was crafted to give him a push and to ensure that he would become even more interested and curious about me.

Although we were two different people, I wanted him to be curious about how I viewed the world as a genius. I also wanted him to know my perspective.

Moreover, I was running out of time. There was nothing more stimulating and entertaining than that kind of story. It was easy to ignore it in the beginning, but it was not so easy to stop being interested once he became interested in it.

'Maybe it really is because of me.'

He was probably staring at me as if he was watching a soap opera. If that was the case, he'd be no different from the Crooked Guardian and the Wolf Crying Under the Crescent Moon.

‘He wants to know where I’m going.’

‘You’re curious about the dying genius’ next destination, right? You want to see how I’m different from you, right? You want to know why you failed in your first life and why the GENIUSES chose me to help you, right?

‘I have a feeling I got those right.’

After I said goodbye to the Master of the Slender Tentacle Familia, I heard a voice somewhere.

“Damn it.”

“…”

“I shouldn’t have gotten involved with Woo Hyo-Yeol… If I were in the same group as Lee Ki-Young, we wouldn’t be in this mess.”

“We were just unlucky. Even here, the winner wins. The guys who worked with Lee Ki-Young all received an offer from major or at least mid-sized familias. Damn it… how are we going to make a living now? What if we end up in the streets…”

“Seriously…”

“Who knew one mock battle would put us in this situation? Come to think of it, did Woo Hyo-Yeol even go over the plan with us? He was too busy getting all the attention.”

“He ruined the party.”

“He ruined it for all of us.”

The losers were feeling sorry for themselves again. They hadn’t noticed that I was nearby because they grouped up and grumbled among themselves. The sight made me sigh to myself.

‘They don’t even know anything.’

I tried to walk past them while pretending that I couldn’t hear them, but I stopped in my tracks.

‘This is… ‘

I felt like the dying Lee Ki-Young was about to burst out of me when I realized that Woo Hyo-Yeol could be watching me from somewhere.

Obviously, Flower Ki-Young disliked him, and like I told him, I was denying Woo Hyo-Yeol, but a part of me was envious and respectful of him.

I could have acknowledged and respected his way of life, as he had been living on the continent as a free bird and did not care about what other people thought about him.

That was what my inner self was telling me.

He didn’t deserve to be looked down on by someone like these guys.

He was scummy and disrespectful, but he didn’t deserve such treatment, at the very least.

“Take back… what you said,” I said.

“What?”

“I want you to…” I paused.

“…”

“Take back! What you said!” I shouted.

“We… didn’t even do anything… so why—”

“I said to take it back!” I yelled.

'I'll use them as sacrifices to summon Woo Hyo-Yeol.'

CHAPTER 1112
WOO HYO-YEOL (19)

“Take that back! Take it back!” I shouted.

“We… didn’t even do anything… so what—”

“I said take it back!” I yelled.

I was hoping that these guys had no common sense. It’d be perfect if they were hot-headed and charged at me without thinking about what was going on.

I saw their shocked faces, and it was understandable, as I suddenly started shouting at them.

‘They must be really shocked.’

It was understandable. Flower Ki-Young wasn’t the type to get angry and raise his voice like this, after all. The time we spent together was short, but I was familiar with them, as we were students from the same academy. Of course, they definitely knew me. I was the epitome of calmness and kindness.

I often smiled as well; I was quiet and with nary a greed in me.

I always showed them my innocent side, so I was sure they were surprised to see me yelling hysterically at them.

“I don’t know why you’re acting like this, but—”

“Take back what you guys said,” I interrupted.

“W-We don’t want to,” they stuttered.

The one who caused all this seemed to be the most egotistical out of all of them.

'Yeah, that's what I'm talking about.'

At first glance, their personalities weren't that bad.

One of them looked normal, but the other two had the potential to become third-rate thugs. They were perfect as criminals. They had huge frames, and they looked like they could really knock someone out.

A huge frame wouldn't necessarily mean that one would become a thug, but most thugs had large frames, so I believed they had the potential to become one.

They probably lived a slightly tough life on Earth.

They looked like impulsive thugs, and the sight made me feel even more excited.

"What did you say?" I questioned.

"I said, I'm not going to take it back… I don't know what right you have to tell us what to do… but are we wrong? Also, this is none of your business, so why did you come here and…" they paused.

"…"

"I don't know what kind of relationship you have with that guy, but stop bothering us and leave. We don't like bothering busy people either, and you have a lot of work to do.

"*Tsk*. I don't know why you're acting like this, but this is my way of telling you to stop provoking people who are minding their own business, got that? Shit, this is annoying," he warned.

"He's rude and self-centered, but he's not someone who deserves to be

insulted by people like you," I said.

"What?"

"Before you talk about what's right or wrong and blame others for your defeat, you should reflect on yourselves first. You really don't know why you didn't receive an offer? You really think it's all because of that mock battle?" I asked.

'I'm too upset.'

There was no need for me to defend Woo Hyo-Yeol, so it was unnatural for me to act this upset. Obviously, it was my dying self that was talking, and this incident had triggered my dying self.

There was a chance that my dying self had experienced something like this at some point in my life. I couldn't really remember it, but I probably experienced something like this a long time ago. Actually, not *probably*—I definitely went through something like this.

Of course, it wasn't really *that* big of a deal, so if I just ignored it, I could eventually laugh about it later.

Of course, I wasn't planning on ignoring it.

'I need to turn this into a big deal.'

"If you guys were competent adventurers, you guys would receive offers regardless of the results," I said.

'You guys are incompetent.'

"Do I need to explain why your frontline was destroyed?" I asked.

'I'll explain it if you guys can understand it.'

"You guys couldn't even move past the first defense line…" I paused.

'It's your fault.'

"You guys just didn't think about taking the lead. You simply waited for someone to lead you guys. People like you… are always like that," I told them.

'You just want to be carried.'

"Did you know? The recruiters of familias value one's nature the most…" I revealed.

'You guys have terrible personalities.'

"You can live like that your entire life. Nothing… nothing will change anyway," I told them.

'Losers like you are destined to live that way and then die.'

"What?!"

"…"

"You bastard!"

'Go ahead and hit me. What are you looking at? Hit me.'

I looked at the guy who could potentially be a scum, but he wouldn't dare touch me.

'Ah, man! They're not that gutsy, which makes them a third-rate thug.'

They were probably aware of my background and abilities. If that weren't the case, those angry idiots wouldn't just stand there and do nothing.

We just happened to be in a secluded area. In addition, the representatives of the familias and powerful players were leaving the academy.

This was the perfect timing to teach these immature fools, who were all talk and no action, a big lesson that they would never forget. It was unlikely, but

the GENIUSES watching them were probably encouraging them.

The ones who enjoyed action could be encouraging them while throwing their coins at them. My heart raced as I waited for them to jump me, but they dared not move.

'Ah… they're better at reading the room than I thought.'

'It's a shame, but should I end it here?'

'Haa… '

"Losers," I spat coldly and turned back around to leave, but…

"Y-You bastard! What do you know?!" someone yelled and shoved me. I was surprised to see the attacker, as he looked the most normal among them.

"H-How dare you say that when you know nothing?!" he yelled. The problem started when the bribe that I had received from the Slender Tentacle Familia fell out of my inner pocket.

The master clearly hadn't tied the pouch properly, as the gold and the gems inside all fell to the ground. They fell on the ground so dramatically that it seemed like they were intentionally thrown on the ground.

The gazes of the aspiring thugs changed drastically at the sight of them.

"Hey! Grab him!"

"*Huh?*"

"Cover his mouth! You bastard! His mouth!"

Rough hands covered my mouth, and the normal guy who actually did something first looked shocked.

"W-What are you guys going to do?!" he asked.

'What do you mean? That's why you should be careful who you make friends with.'

"Isn't it obvious? Idiot. Grab that. Hurry!"

The two guys with huge frames were doing great as criminals. They covered both my eyes and my mouth. I was sure they'd make a living as bandits once they were out of the academy.

"Hey… w-what are you going to do? We… shouldn't be doing this," said the normal one.

"Shut up and just grab that, you idiot," one of the thugs ordered.

"We shouldn't—"

"If we just run a bit, we'll reach the warp gate. There aren't that many people left in the academy, so if we run after grabbing this… we might be able to do something," the thug explained.

"…"

"We can make a living without having to deal with those stupid monsters. What are you doing? Grab it already!" the thug shouted.

"*Huh? Huh? Uh…*"

'What are you doing? Hurry up and be an accomplice.'

"*Mmm… mmph!*"

If we weren't at the academy, they would certainly sell me as a slave.

'These evil bastards really are criminals. I'm really good at reading people.'

"You asshole. Genius commander, my ass. What did you call us? Losers? You're just a naive little kid. Say it again," they demanded.

“Who…”

I struggled, and the hand on my mouth was removed.

I looked up and saw him raising his hand.

‘Shit. I think he’s actually going to hit me.’

“Shut up, you asshole.”

At this point, someone would grab this criminal’s hand and stop him, right? Helping at the critical juncture was how things usually went.

People would usually appear at the critical juncture to help those in need, but…

Smack!

“*Mmph!*”

I was having fun imagining it until I saw his raised hand flying toward my face.

I heard a *smack*, but I couldn’t process the pain because the criminal kicked my abdomen with his knee.

I was immediately out of breath. It felt like something was going to come out of my stomach, but a hand covered my mouth and forced me to swallow it.

I couldn’t describe the pain, and I wanted to roll around while holding my stomach.

One of the thugs was busy gathering the precious goods, and I was furious at the sight.

‘You shameless bastards.’

[The God of Sunset♥ is screaming.]

‘Hyun-Sung. Damn it, Hyun-Sung. I got hit.’

[The God of Sunset♥ says !@92DA!#^#%&@!]

[The God of Sunset♥ is unleashing an indescribable anger. He suggests tearing those guys to death. He’s biting his lips to the point that it’s bleeding. He’s expressing fury toward your enemies.]

‘These assholes… ‘

[The God of Sunset♥ says
$^!@#^&**&*!@#DASG!@#%^!()&&^^%!!$%^&]

‘Stop swearing.’

It wasn’t just Kim Hyun-Sung, as everyone sent messages upon witnessing the unexpected incident.

They all had different reactions, but most of them were angry.

The Goddess of Flower and Fertility, the Gatekeeper of Heaven, the Abyss, and the Golden Throne were angry. Why was the Slender Tentacle Queen suddenly donating 50,000 coins? Why was the Mistress of the Holy Night… spending her coins as well?

“W-What do we do about Lee Ki-Young?” one of them asked.

“What do you mean? Just leave him. Search his body. He might have more,” the thug ordered.

‘He’s pretty smart when it comes to things like this.’

“You bastard. So you were bribed,” the thug said.

“I-If Lee Ki-Young reports us—”

“Do you think we’ll get caught just because he reports us?” the thug

questioned.

'They have rangers here as well, you know.'

"We just need to walk into any warp gate and run. We just need to be in hiding for a little bit. For a little bit… The higher-ups are going to be busy with the mainstream and dungeon raids anyway, and there's no way those guys will come to a remote just to catch us," the thug explained.

"…"

"The one watching me right now has promised to support me as well," the normal one said.

[The God of Sunset♥ says ^&!@##!DGAXPQ9182YN]

'All right, just stop it already. You did something like this too by stabbing a certain someone.'

They let go of me, and I rolled on the ground.

"*Ack!*" I screamed upon getting kicked. It seemed like they wanted to beat me up one last time because they kicked me again. After collecting the precious goods on the ground, they turned around to leave the scene of the crime.

"W-Where should we go?"

"Just follow me for now."

I grabbed my stomach and retched.

And that was when I heard a familiar voice…

"What…"

"…"

"What are you doing?"

CHAPTER 1113
WOO HYO-YEOL (20)

It had to be Woo Hyo-Yeol, William, or the Master of the Slender Tentacle Queen Familia. It could be Lim Cheong-Ha or Han Seung-Yoon, but I was hoping Woo Hyo-Yeol had come to save me since I didn't have long to live.

This happened because of him, so it was only right for him to be here.

'I'm sure he's been watching me.'

The others had already left, so I was sure it was him.

I was in pain, so my senses were in a mess. When my vision finally improved, the person I saw before me was someone no different from the thugs earlier…

"…"

"…"

It was a blond-haired and tanned thug.

'W-Woo Hyo-Yeol!'

He still looked cold and unapproachable. He had countless piercings all over his face, and he had a cocky and arrogant demeanor. He was still wearing the typical thug outfit he had been wearing since the tutorial dungeon.

However, what caught my attention the most was his predatory aura.

His cold and downcast eyes were filled with contempt as if he were sneering at his prey, but strangely, there was a hint of annoyance in his eyes. I had no idea why, but I felt like I knew why he was annoyed.

He was annoyed at himself for getting involved in such a troublesome situation.

“Y-You…” one of the thugs stuttered.

“I asked you what you’re doing,” Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

“W-We’re just…”

The three thugs froze when they saw a thug who was superior to them.

However, it was too late to give any excuses.

‘You guys were caught in the act. You got caught red-handed!’

I was sure he had been watching me, but the victim and the culprits were already clear at first glance. There were two big guys and a normal-looking guy.

They looked really happy, and it was probably because they had successfully committed a crime. There were some leftover gems and gold on the ground, but the most important detail was the fact that Flower Ki-Young was sprawled out on the ground with his face covered with his blood.

Even if their parents were here, they wouldn’t be able to defend them. It was undeniable that those criminals had beaten me up and stolen my precious goods.

No explanation was necessary.

“Damn it…” one of the thugs mumbled.

“…”

“So we…”

‘You think your excuses will work?’

“You see… we…”

‘It won’t work at all.’

“…”

“Get him, damn it!” one of the thugs shouted.

“What? What?!” the other thug questioned.

“Kill that bastard!” one of the thugs ordered.

In the end, their choices were limited. They could either turn themselves in or find a way to escape. Unfortunately, the latter was a stupid choice.

“*Ahhh!*”

Woo Hyo-Yeol dodged the guy who punched first, and then he twisted the latter’s arm.

“*Ack… AAAARGH! Aaaah!* My arm! M-My arm!” the thug shouted.

“You’re noisy,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

I closed my eyes when I saw the thug’s arm getting twisted in ways I had no idea was even possible. He collapsed to the ground and with a scream, but Woo Hyo-Yeol, the cold-hearted thug, showed no mercy and stepped on the back of the thug’s hand.

“*AAAAH!*”

“I said you were being loud,” Woo Hyo-Yeol repeated.

“*Ugh… ack!*”

Woo Hyo-Yeol immediately punched the thug’s face, and the ground was soon stained with his blood.

‘He’s really violent.’

He was smurfing, but it was fun to watch as well.

Actually, this fight was over.

Before the other two could join the reckless fight, one of them was already rolling on the ground in pain while covered in his own blood.

I knew there was a difference in their level, but they couldn’t possibly fight back against Woo Hyo-Yeol. Those thugs definitely knew that better than anyone. To add to that, the normal-looking started trembling at the brutal sight.

It was kind of heartbreaking, as he had never really intended to turn all this into a crime, but it was too late for regrets.

“I-I’m sorry. I… lost my mind… for a moment…” one of the thugs said.

“Don’t move! You bastard!” the other thug shouted.

“…”

“If you move, I’ll twist this guy’s neck,” he threatened.

“…”

“I’m… not joking. If you take another step, I’m going to… twist Lee Ki-Young’s neck,” he repeated.

‘That’s why you should be careful who you make friends with.’

There was room for mitigation, but the criminal’s violent hands had already grabbed my head. He couldn’t think of any other way aside from violence…

‘He really is the typical villain.’

“…”

“Don’t move! I-I killed people before. You think I’m joking?” he confessed.

“…”

“Move it!” he yelled.

“…”

“Move it, you bastard. What are you looking at me? Didn’t you hear what I just said? I said move it! Unless you want to see something really ugly!” he threatened.

“Kill him,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“W-What?”

“It doesn’t matter to me, so twist his head and kill him,” he said.

“Y-You asshole… Y-You think I won’t do it?” the thug stuttered.

“That’s why I said to kill him,” he said.

It wasn’t a battle of nerves.

With a sly smirk, Woo Hyo-Yeol provoked the thug and cast an urging gaze at the latter. It was like he couldn’t care less whether I survived this ordeal or not. I was kind of upset, but I felt like he knew that the thug had no guts to kill me.

It was obvious. His hands were shaking, and he was slowly letting go of my head.

“Y-You bastard… Woo Hyo-Yeol!” the thug shouted.

Woo Hyo-Yeol stomped and appeared in front of me in the blink of an eye. Then, he kicked the face of the criminal standing behind me.

The extra slammed into a wall and collapsed to the ground.

The normal-looking guy was absolutely terrified, and the sight of it told me that this incident was over.

'At least he knows that he can't kill them. We're still inside the academy, so letting the security guards take care of this will make things less annoying. Yeah, I agree.'

"…"

"…"

"…"

There was an awkward silence. I was too embarrassed to ask why he was here and why he helped me. The sick Lee Ki-Young couldn't express his gratitude because his pride was getting in his way.

I probably looked pretty pathetic. I allowed people to praise me by calling me "Genius Commander," and a few minutes after I rejected all offers from those familias as if I had something up my sleeve, this incident somehow happened.

What would have happened if Woo Hyo-Yeol hadn't stepped in to help Lee Ki-Young?

What would have happened if we had been in the slums of a small city instead of the academy? I wouldn't be standing here like this. I received help from the type of person I hated the most, and my pride wouldn't let me express my gratitude.

'It's the worst.'

It was really… bad.

'Flower Ki-Young… i-is this the kind of man you are?'

A part of me felt ashamed and jealous of Woo Hyo-Yeol. Horrible emotions

were swirling inside me.

'I'm really... really... the worst.'

Woo Hyo-Yeol looked embarrassed as well. Normally, other people would ask if I was hurt anywhere, but sadly, he wasn't a normal person.

He was confused about why he was here, and asking me if I was okay was a hard task for him. Of course, he had to say something. He was having a hard time enduring the silence, so he ended up saying something first.

"How pathetic."

"…"

"You're really pathetic," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

He threw the pouch full of precious goods in front of me. I got up slowly and wiped my face clean. Woo Hyo-Yeol said nothing. He created a heavy atmosphere and just stared at me.

"I…" I paused.

"…"

"I know that I'm pathetic," I continued.

"…"

"And… thank you… for helping me," I added.

I staggered my way past Woo Hyo-Yeol, but the guy who remained quiet after calling me "pathetic" asked, "Why."

"…"

"Why did you interfere?" asked Woo Hyo-Yeol.

‘So he was watching.’

I knew it.

“It had nothing to do with you,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“…”

“Why did you interfere?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked again.

“You were… watching?” I asked.

“Answer me, Lee Ki-Young,” Woo Hyo-Yeol demanded.

‘Did you just say my name?’

What would be a good answer? I had lots of choices, but an overly touching answer would easily cause side effects. A normal answer was probably the best choice here. I decided to just mumble my answer without any emotions.

“I just… I just didn’t like what they said,” I answered.

That had to be enough…

“I just didn’t like hearing them blame you when they didn’t even do anything, and before I knew it… I ended up… in that situation,” I added.

‘Let’s not listen to his answer, and there’s no need to look back at him either.’

Going my own way was the right thing to do here. If one were to take a step forward to approach a wild dog, the wild dog would usually take a step backward. Until our relationship had reached a certain point, I had to avoid reaching my hand out to him.

Woo Hyo-Yeol would take care of those thugs, so I ought to just head to the warp gate.

My face and mood were in a mess, but thinking of this as a brutal initiation

ceremony made it easy for me to endure the ordeal as I started walking away.

I got involved in something stupid by acting like an idiot.

It was so stupid that Flower Ki-Young wouldn't normally get involved in something like this, but I wasn't upset at all. I was in pain, and the type of person I despised had to help me, but looking back at it now, I didn't feel distressed at all.

'This isn't the end, right, Hyo-Yeol?'

I hoped the incident just now would help him make the right decision.

'You won't… let me down, right?'

If we were to part now, we wouldn't see each other for a while.

Upon our next meeting, I believed he wouldn't be as confused as he was today.

'Please… '

"This is the central warp gate. Where would you like to go?" a staff member asked.

"Harizel, please," I answered.

"Okay. I'll teleport you to Harizel," they replied.

And that was when I heard a familiar voice…

"One more for Harizel."

I looked back and saw *him.* Once again, he had appeared out of nowhere. When we were growing apart, he carefully took a step forward.

Before I could ask anything, he mumbled, "Don't get the wrong idea."

“What?”

“We just happened to be heading to the same place,” Woo Hyo-Yeol answered.

‘Woo Hyooooooooo-Yeooooooool!’

“…”

‘I knew you were going to come with me, damn it!’

CHAPTER 1114
WRONGFUL ENCOUNTER (1)

"I… I did it…" a woman mumbled.

"…"

"I… I… I did it! O-Oppa… S-Sora, I did it!" the woman shouted.

"…" "*He… hehehe… hehehehe! Hehehe… pfft*!" The woman giggled.

"…"

"O-O-Oppa! *Hehe… hehehehe!*" the woman shouted.

It was a pitiful sight.

"*Hehehehe… hehehehehehe…*" The woman giggled.

I[1] was sure I wasn't the only one who felt this way, and just as I expected, I saw people casting pitying gazes at her. This sight was actually common in Rohen. People like her appeared pretty often here, so she couldn't be considered a special case at all.

'Is she sick in the head?'

There were many reasons behind her mental state. She could have gone on a monster hunt or a dungeon expedition, but she was the only survivor and lost every person close to her. She could have also participated in a war and witnessed some awful scenes on the battlefield.

There was also a chance that she encountered a psychic-type monster capable of inflicting mental-type attacks.

Some people kept on denying the fact that they had been summoned to another world, while some couldn't adapt during the tutorial dungeon.

The Rohen Continent was cold and indifferent, especially toward those with weak minds.

More often than not, death wasn't what awaited those who weren't chosen by the GENIUSES or couldn't make a connection with a familia. They would usually become like her. The sight wasn't a big deal, but her outfit was the reason people were looking at her with pitying gazes.

'A dress and… white heels.'

Her outfit seemed more suitable for Earth than Rohen.

The woman was mumbling and smiling in the middle of the square, so she was probably summoned here recently.

She wasn't a low-ranking player on Rohen but a rookie who had just arrived on the continent. Either she didn't join or was kicked out of the Beginner's Academy. She had to have been unable to adapt to her circumstances, which led to her becoming homesick and eventually mentally ill.

I could tell by the two small dolls she was holding tightly in her hands.

Actually, were those even dolls? The poorly rolled-up cloths were shaped like humans, and their faces looked like they were drawn by a child. I noticed that they were sewn, and she had to have made them with great difficulty, as evidenced by the fact that her fingers were wrapped in dirty rags.

She even looked horrible. Clearly, she hadn't washed up for months because I could smell her stench all the way from here, and her hair was in a mess. There were unknown stains on her white dress and heels. She also had a habit of biting her nails and scratching her head vigorously.

Had she been living outside the city and had just entered the city? I wasn't really interested because there was no need for me to know the horrors that

she had to endure outside, but…

'How did such a small… and cute child… '

End up with such severe emotional scars?

What kind of trauma had she experienced that she was wandering around the square looking like that?

"Unni, you're not having strange thoughts again, are you?" a woman asked me.

"*Huh?*"

"You've been… staring at her for a while now." She pointed out.

"…"

"You remember saying that the last time was the last time, right?" she asked me.

"It's not… like that," I mumbled.

"I'm just reminding you… that we don't have any room. We're not volunteers… and bringing in more people will make things harder for us. It's different from taking in stray cats and dogs. Not only that, she's also crazy."

"…"

"Only major familias can do charity work. We're a party that just started settling in… and Se-Hyung oppa left the party last time because you meddled so much. You promised that won't happen again…" the woman said, reminding me.

"But… I think she's Korean… We're from the same country, so we should help each other out," I argued.

“Who cares?! No one cares about that here! If you’re going to bring that up, the last person who backstabbed us last time was Korean as well! Just thinking about that asshole running away with our money makes my blood boil…” the woman complained.

“But she doesn’t have any place to go… Don’t you think it’s too cold-hearted for us to ignore her? I think we should at least offer her a place to stay for the night and offer her warm food,” I said.

“One night becomes one month, and one month becomes forever, unni,” she argued.

“But… I still feel bad for her. If she continues living like that, she won’t last a week. Actually… I don’t even know if she’ll get through today… Someone should do something,” I told her.

“…”

“…”

“*Ahh!* Do whatever you want. Gosh!” Chae-Ryeong roared and stomped away, but she seemed like she wanted me to take care of that woman as well. She was also in a horrible state when she was rescued, so I was sure that woman reminded her of her past self. Just as I expected, I saw her immediately heading toward the square.

“Hey, you…” Chae-Ryeong called out.

“You’ll scare her if you talk that way, Chae-Ryeong,” I said.

“…”

“Excuse me… do you have a moment?” I asked.

“…”

“Excuse me… *um… umm…* do you… have a moment?” I asked again.

The woman finally heard me because she looked at me.

'Huh?'

Something about her seemed off, but that feeling was erased as soon as I sensed her being extremely wary of us. Perhaps it was because we were standing too close to her. With that in mind, we took a step backward to tell her that we meant no harm, and I saw her relaxing a bit.

However, she was still scared, and I could see her hunched over, seemingly in fear.

The sight broke my heart, so I took another step backward and asked, "I'm Nam Goong-Seon. And you are?"

"…"

"…"

"…"

After a while, she stammered, "J-Jung Ha-Yan…"

"*Ah*, that's a pretty name. Ha-Yan… Jung Ha-Yan," I said.

"…"

"If you don't mind me asking… do you have a place to stay?" I asked.

"…"

She was warier than I thought. My heart ached when I noticed how cautious she was with her words. She had to have been through a lot…

"Miss Ha-Yan… please listen and don't misunderstand. We… want to help you…" I said.

"…"

“We can give you a place to stay… food… and…” I paused.

“I don’t… need your help…” she mumbled.

“What?”

“I’m… going to go meet my o-oppa…” she stuttered.

“…”

“…”

“*Huh?*”

“I’m… going to meet… o-o-o-oppa. *A-Ah!* S-Sora as well,” Jung Ha-Yan added.

She smiled brightly as she looked down at her dolls.

“D-Do you mean your older-”

“M-My boyfriend. *Ah… ahh…* no. M-My fiance… my fiance… *he… hehe…* yeah, my fiance…” Jung Ha-Yan interrupted me.

“…”

“I-I’m sure we came here together… but we got separated on the way here…” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“*Ah.*”

‘So he died.’

They were lucky enough to be summoned together, but his fiance had to have died in the tutorial dungeon, and the shock of it rendered her in this state. I could tell how important he was to her based on her smile while talking about him. Earlier, she was timid, but now she sounded and looked a little happier while talking about him.

“I see,” I said.

“O-Oppa… *he… hehe…”* she giggled.

“Unni… I think… she—”

“Don’t say anything, Chae-Ryeong. T-Then, Miss Ha-Yan, how about…” I paused.

“…”

“H-How about you rest for a moment… and take a bath?” I suggested.

“N-No… N-No…” Jung Ha-Yan mumbled.

“*Ah…”*

The stubborn Jung Ha-Yan finally showed a reaction. For a moment, I was shocked because she was staring at me for some reason, but I nodded after realizing what she was staring at.

She was looking at the item hanging around my neck. I was sure she was looking at her reaction reflected in the mirror. Despite being mentally unstable, she had to have realized that she was in a bad state.

‘There’s hope.’

Knowing that she hadn’t gone completely mad was a great thing. It would take some time, but the possibility of her returning to her normal self made me smile.

“I-I need to wash up,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“…”

“I-I think I need a new set of clothes as well…” she added.

“You can wash up and change your clothes. You’re going to go meet your

fiance, right? Chae-Ryeong, do you happen to have—"

"Yeah, I have it. I think we're similar in size…" Chae-Ryeong answered.

"Hold on…" I said.

Jung Ha-Yan was hesitant at first, but she eventually nodded. And

Chae-Ryeong definitely felt relieved at the sight, as I saw her sighing in relief.

"If we just walk for about twenty minutes… *Ah!* Have you eaten yet?" I asked.

Rumble!

Jung Ha-Yan's stomach rumbled just then. She had to be feeling embarrassed because her face turned slightly red as she lowered her head.

"You should eat while you're there. Chae-Ryeong, let the guild house know," I instructed her.

"Okay, unni."

Just as I expected, things ended smoothly. Unlike the first time when she had her guard up, she wasn't running away or throwing a fit. She actually looked like she was in a hurry because she was moving faster.

I was kind of sad because she seemed more interested in cleaning herself up and meeting her fiance than getting something to eat. However, the fact that she could hold a conversation with other people and the fact that she realized her bad state told me that her condition wasn't all that bad.

"Unni, did you hear?" asked Chae-Ryeong.

"About what?" I asked.

"About Lee Ki-Young," Chae-Ryeong answered.

Jung Ha-Yan stopped walking just then.

"*Ah*, you mean the top player at the academy? The… genius commander?" I asked.

"Yeah. He rejected the Flower and Fertility Familia's offer and all offers made by the other familias. I heard he's heading to Harizel… According to the rumors, he received massive support and is planning on establishing a familia," she explained.

"Really?"

"And it's the same for Han Sora. She rejected all the offers and is heading to Arhendel… *Oh*… I heard they're lovers… they even act the same way. They're too perfect. Looks like geniuses truly end up with other geniuses. Their starting point is really different from ours…" Chae-Ryeong added.

Thud.

"*Huh?*"

"Miss Ha-Yan?" I said.

"W-What… did you… j-j-j-just…" Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

Something was wrong here.

"*Uh… uh… uh… hiccup… huh?*"

"Miss Ha-Yan? Miss Ha-Yan? Are you okay?" I asked.

"S-S-Sora… Sora… O-O-Oppa…" Jung Ha-Yan mumbled.

Blood flowed down from her clenched hand. Her eyes were bloodshot, and a strange mana billowed out of her. My legs shook by themselves as if I were a mouse standing in front of a cat.

I couldn't breathe properly, and I couldn't move or speak because of the indescribable pressure. My heart was suddenly pervaded by an instinctive

fear that humans would feel upon seeing something enormous beyond their common sense.

'Something… is wrong.'

I couldn't help but think that way as soon as I saw her eyes.

"Y-You're… l-lying," Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

'What kind of… power… '

"Y-Y-You're!!! Liars!!!" Jung Ha-Yan roared.

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1. Nam Goong-Seon's POV ☜

CHAPTER 1115
WRONGFUL ENCOUNTER (2)

"Y-You! Liars!" Jung Ha-Yan shouted.

"*Ah… uh…*"

"You're bad people!!! Y-Y-You jerks! Y-You'll be punished for this! You'll be punished!" Jung Ha-Yan yelled.

I couldn't think clearly, and the only thing that I had in mind was to get away from this place. Jung Ha-Yan grabbed my clothes so strongly that it felt like I was being dragged away. I tried to move, but I was so scared that my body wouldn't respond to me.

'Uh? Uh?'

Was it just me? The sky suddenly darkened. I was sure it was midday, but it felt like it suddenly turned into night. A dark shadow engulfed the entire city all of a sudden.

Was I seeing things because I was overwhelmed by that petite woman's screams?

However, I knew I wasn't mistaken because I heard loud noises around me. The city was consumed by panic, and fear of the unknown forced my frozen body to move.

"What… is that?"

"R-Run…"

"Run! Damn it! What the hell is that?!"

"*Kyaaaaaaaah!*"

"Run! Get out of here! Get out!"

"Damn it… damn it… W-What…"

"Help me! Help me!!!"

"*AAAH!*"

The city was filled with screams as people scattered in different directions.

People ran somewhere with fear-stricken faces.

Although everyone had different destinations, the sight of them desperately trying to get out of the square was beyond strange.

The square immediately became chaotic. The goods of the vendors were thrown to the ground, people fell to the ground while running, parents ran frantically away with their children in their arms, and some threw away the items in their hands just to run faster.

In just a few minutes, the peaceful city was plunged into chaos. Many people cast dumbfounded and despairing looks at the sky.

"How… is this… Are the bastards from the Kirian Kingdom behind this?"

"…"

"Has a war… broken out or something? *Haa*… damn it… h-how come this type of spell is…"

Despair was written all over their faces, and an overwhelming sense of helplessness engulfed them, knowing that nothing would change no matter how much they struggled.

I did the same and looked up at the sky…

“U-Unni…” Chae-Ryeong mumbled.

A giant meteor emerged from the gray clouds.

“*Ah…*”

‘Am I… dreaming right now?’

A meteor had suddenly manifested in the sky…

‘Am I… dreaming right now?’

Just a moment ago, we were going back to the guild house, so why was a meteor suddenly falling down on us?

“It’s a lie!!!” Jung Ha-Yan screamed.

When I looked at her again, I noticed her glaring at me with bloodshot eyes and blood rolling down from her nose.

‘It’s her.’

“W-Who are you guys?! Who are you!!!!! *Eek! Eeeek!*” Jung Ha-Yan yelled.

‘It’s her doing.’

“Who the hell are you?!” Jung Ha-Yan screamed. I had no idea how she did something like this, as she had never cast a spell. I couldn’t feel any fluctuations of mana, but there was an unexplainable phenomenon around her. Something thick and hazy, like a mirage, surrounded her.

Even the wind that was blowing as violently as a typhoon was useless against her.

Unlike our surroundings, which seemed like hell, neither mine nor Chae-Ryeong’s robes and collars were moving.

It was simply an assumption, but the woman before me could be the reason

behind all this.

This situation was difficult to understand from a logical standpoint, but there was no other way to explain the phenomenon.

“It’s a lie… It’s all a lie!” Jung Ha-Yan yelled.

“*Eek! Eeeek!*”

“W-We’re not liars! Miss Witch!” Chae-Ryeong shouted with a pale face. It seemed that she had reached the same conclusion as me.

“D-D-Don’t make me laugh! *Eek!*” Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

“It’s true! I’m not lying. I-I heard it as well, so… please…” Chae-Ryeong begged.

“Don’t lie to me!” she yelled.

“I heard it from a reliable source! P-People who are interested in the things happening at the academy all know this. Everyone knows this! It’s true. Please believe me. Please! I’m… sorry. Trust me, Miss Witch! So please spare me. Please… let me live! I-I can’t… die yet,” Chae-Ryeong begged.

“I-I don’t believe you! I don’t!” Jung Ha-Yan screamed.

“Please give us time to explain. We just need time… please! We’re not liars! Please!” I begged.

“…”

“Please…”

Jung Ha-Yan bit her lips with unwavering eyes.

“Please give us a chance! Just one chance…” I said.

“…”

“We can prove it! We can prove it to you!!!” Chae-Ryeong added.

“…”

“Give us a chance, Miss Witch!” she yelled.

Just then, Jung Ha-Yan’s nose stopped bleeding, and the sky gradually brightened up again. The small town, which had transformed into a hellish place, suddenly became a quiet town. Those hiding beneath the vendors’ stalls and covering their eyes and ears while waiting for their death looked up to the sky along with those who ran somewhere.

They looked dumbfounded. It was like an illusion spell was cast on the entire city as everyone examined themselves in disbelief.

“*Heuk…* you’re… lying… *hiccup… heuk… heuk…”* Jung Ha-Yan cried.

“…” “*Hiccup… heuk…* you’re lying,” she said.

One person was crying, though. Jung Ha-Yan was sobbing to the point that I questioned whether she was the same person we met just a few moments ago. Her small and frail shoulders were shaking, and she gathered her hands as if she were praying.

I couldn’t really see her face because she lowered her head, but she probably looked like an abandoned puppy.

“Unni… w-what happened just now…” Chae-Ryeong said.

“…”

“Unni…”

“Hold on, Chae-Ryeong. It’s crucial we don’t scare her,” I told her.

“…”

"…" "It's… a lie… *Heuk*… o-o-oppa…" she cried.

"Did… something happen?" I asked.

"*Heuuung…"*

"Miss Ha-Yan?" I said.

"S-S-So… S-Sora…" she stuttered.

"…"

"I-I trusted Sora… so with o-oppa… B-But Sora… The three of us… spent time together often… S-She seemed like she took an interest in him at some point… C-Come to think of it, I-I've seen… Sora and oppa together often… t-they talked a lot… a-and they sometimes talked about things unknown to me.

"S-Sora was working as his secretary… I-I think she wanted to keep that job… now that I think about it. W-When Sora… stopped working, s-she looked really sad… so I thought it was strange…" Jung Ha-Yan explained.

"…"

"A-After… we got separated… *hiccup… heuk…* I was wondering why they didn't contact me… I-I thought they were avoiding me… that's what I thought… *hiccup… heuk…"* Jung Ha-Yan added.

I couldn't figure out what she was trying to say. She couldn't speak properly because she was crying, and I was also busy calming down my racing heart. One thing I was sure of was that she summoned that meteor just now.

The ends of her hair had turned white, which was proof that she was suffering from mana exhaustion.

"W-We slept on the bed together… a-and because of that, Sora… o-oppa… was really… really… *heuk… hiccup*…" Jung Ha-Yan added.

“U-Unni, let’s run too,” Chae-Ryeong whispered.

But…

‘To where?’

Where were we going to run? If that meteor fell from the sky, we weren’t the only ones who were going to die. The city itself, no, this entire region would disappear. It was safe to say that running away was the worst possible option and…

‘Lee Ki-Young and Han Sora?’

And Jung Ha-Yan, who was standing before me…

Could this really be a coincidence? Was it really a coincidence that two geniuses and a mysterious mage were suddenly summoned here? I couldn’t help but think that there was something more going on here.

This coincidence was too unnatural to think of it as the ramblings of a heartbroken woman. I wasn’t sure what it was, but I couldn’t stop thinking that something was happening behind the scenes.

[A Gentle Glow that Reassures the Forgotten agrees with you and nods.]

[A Gentle Glow that Reassures the Forgotten thinks that you shouldn’t leave that woman alone.]

‘I agree, Gentle Glow.’

First, I examined her slowly.

‘She won’t suddenly harm me.’

She wasn’t in any state to attack or cause harm to anyone.

She was already weak. Her hair color was returning to its original color, so I

deduced that she was already in the middle of recovering her mana.

However, the mana exhaustion wasn't the reason I was sure that she wouldn't just attack anyone. I couldn't really explain it, but it felt like she was slowly crumbling away.

"I-I see," I said.

I grabbed her shaking hands and patted her head.

"You must be heartbroken," I said.

After gathering some courage, I hugged her, and she hugged me back.

For a moment, I felt pain as if my back was going to snap…

"The rumors may not be true," I told her.

"Yeah…"

"I-I heard you're engaged to that man named Lee Ki-Young," I said.

"Yeah… I mean… yes… O-Oppa… the continent—*Ah… ah!* I'm not supposed to tell you that," Jung Ha-Yan mumbled.

"What? What do you…"

"*Ah*… it's nothing… it's nothing…" Jung Ha-Yan replied.

"A-Anyway, it's not too late to check with your own eyes, Miss Ha-Yan. I heard Miss Han Sora and Mr. Lee Ki-Young are important people to you… Do you really think those two people will betray you?" I questioned.

Jung Ha-Yan shook her head.

Chae-Ryeong, who said she wasn't a liar, looked pale, but what was important to her right now wasn't confirming whether the rumors were true or not.

“I-I’m sure it’s not true. Y-Yeah… I’m sure,” Jung Ha-Yan mumbled.

“Right? L-Let’s head to the guild house together. You can wash up and eat… and get some rest. How about we think about what comes after later? You might… not be able to think positively because you’re too exhausted right now. I’m sure I heard… you say that you were going to meet your oppa,” I suggested.

“I-I was…” Jung Ha-Yan answered.

‘Is she calm now?’

Actually, it was probably because she didn’t want to be alone.

“I-If it’s true…” Jung Ha-Yan mumbled.

“How about we think about that when it actually happens?” I asked.

The way she pulled my sleeve made it seem like she was asking me for help.

“T-Take me with you,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“What?”

“Let’s go… together,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“Where…?” I asked.

“…”

“…”

“Harizel,” Jung Ha-Yan answered.

“…”

“T-To meet oppa,” Jung Ha-Yan added.

CHAPTER 1116
A COMRADE WHOSE TRUSTWORTHINESS IS UNCERTAIN (1)

“For now, I think the most important thing is delivering results,” I[1] said.

“…”

“I received a lot of funds from Fertility, the Slender Tentacle, and other mid-sized familias, but there probably aren’t a lot of familias that can keep investing in me. More importantly, if we don’t show any results, the attention we received in the beginning will eventually disappear. It applies to both of us. They’re hoping that we grow into a party capable of taking important roles, like leading major expeditions,” I continued.

“…”

“The reason I chose Harizel as my first destination is that I thought this was a good start for people like us. The warp gate is directly connected to the central region, but it’s not stable and still underdeveloped. High-quality equipment is also widely available in this place, and you can get items at a low price,” I explained.

“…”

“More importantly, most of the people working in Harizel are talented people who want to advance to the central region. It’s good to train players who have potential, but what the party needs right now are veterans who can become immediate assets,” I said.

“…”

“We should be able to recruit Level 4 and 5 players who couldn’t advance to

the central region. They will probably be a bit uncomfortable at first, but if we show potential… they'll beg us to join our party. What I'm looking for are unpolished gems that have yet to see the light," I said.

"…"

"*Ah!* The only variable… is the tension between the Kirian Kingdom and the Brittinian Kingdom. I'm not sure if this information is accurate, but the Brittinian Kingdom is claiming that they were attacked with a spell cast by someone from the Kirian Kingdom. It happened yesterday, so we'll probably get the details tomorrow," I informed him.

"…"

"It's too early to draw any conclusions. Even if a war breaks out right now, there's no guarantee that the players in Harizel will join the war. Of course, if the war between these two nations ends up becoming a mainstream event… it'll interfere with my plans… but looking at Rohen's current situation, that probably won't happen," I explained.

"…"

"If we move fast, we shouldn't have any trouble creating a party," I added.

"…"

"*Ah!* I'm thinking about having four to five people in our party. We'll get a priest who can support you, a mage specializing in support-type magic, someone with a ranger-type class such as a thief or archer, and a tank who can take care of the frontline. Obviously, the party will be centered around you," I informed him.

"…"

Woo Hyo-Yeol looked at me quietly while crossing his arms. He looked kind of arrogant and annoyed, and he seemed to be questioning what I was doing here.

‘It was as natural as the flowing water.’

Upon using the warp gate in the academy to reach Harizel, we registered at the Adventurer Guild, and then we checked in at an inn.

By the way, I was the first to follow Woo Hyo-Yeol. Since the accommodations were limited, it would be more advantageous to stay somewhere close to each other for basically the same price.

It was also great that we could meet every morning and talk to each other.

Of course, the wild dog tended to take a step backward whenever I took a step forward toward it, but the wild dog couldn’t leave my side at all.

‘That’s a given.’

Of course, it wasn’t like I welcomed him to my place, nor did I suggest that we do something together. I also wasn’t calling him my comrade.

The most important thing was to make sure that everything happened naturally. I also had to eliminate the things that made him feel uncomfortable. He had communication issues, after all.

It wasn’t the best example, but living together would be a start. At some point, we’d leave our stuff in each other’s houses, and we would eventually suggest living together to save on rent. By then, we’d inevitably spend more time as we live together, which would lead to us having a stronger bond.

As time went on, we’d become like family.

It would be an ideal method to change him.

As I mentioned earlier, I never told Woo Hyo-Yeol that we could work together, as there was still a faint distance between us. We were jealous of each other’s abilities, but ironically, we respected each other. I didn’t want to let this script go to waste.

Moreover, the small incident that happened at the academy caused me to like him a bit, but only by about ten points. I liked him enough to talk to him or work with him whenever we met.

I was sure he had realized that I liked him a little bit.

If that hadn't been the case, I wouldn't have shown him kindness when I had been cold to him all this time.

We ran into each other at the cafeteria attached to the inn for breakfast. We sat at the same table and chatted idly, but by the third day, we had started making plans together.

'I'm sure he thinks I asked him to work together from the start.'

Of course, it wasn't easy to break down the wall in Woo Hyo-Yeol's heart.

"…"

"I'm sure…" Woo Hyo-Yeol paused.

"…"

"I told you I had other business," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

'Yeah, yeah. I'm sure you do. I already know that. Who said I didn't know? I understand.'

"I don't have any plans to make a party. There must've been a misunderstanding. Did you think I would start working with you just because I saved you once? You think that alone is enough? I just didn't like those bastards. I came to Harizel because…"

'Yeah, you did. You had personal business to take care of, right? Yeah, I get it.'

"I didn't tell you this because I'm suggesting we create a party together. I just think we can help each other," I told him.

"…"

"Efficiency is the issue. If we have the same goal, there's no reason to work inefficiently. Investigating dungeons and going on expeditions are more effective as a group than doing it alone. I don't even need to mention battles, and what about keeping watch during an expedition?

"You may not need help or feel uncomfortable working with others, but I'm not saying that comfort is what makes things efficient. You can't do everything alone. You may be able to do things alone in the beginning, but you'll eventually need people to help you," I explained.

"…"

"I won't stop you if you really want to waste your time… but do you have a lot of time?" I asked.

"What?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

'Take this!'

"I only have three years left," I reminded him.

"…"

"It's three years at most," I said.

"What… does that have to do with me…" he asked.

"I'm not suggesting that we create a party and grow stronger. It might be better to think of them as people we recruited from an employment agency to help us handle tasks efficiently rather than call them comrades.

"We won't build a familia house nor will we register our party to a guild. We won't even have time to do social activities or give feedback after the expedition," I explained.

"…"

"Obviously, you won't need to keep in touch with the party members, and you don't need to work with them if you feel that you don't need them. You just need to tell me whenever you think you need people to work with, or you can also work on the tasks I found," I told him.

"*Hmph.*"

He scoffed, but I was sure that…

'He can't deny what I said.'

If he hadn't picked Harizel as his starting point, then he would have worked alone, but Harizel was a place that encouraged people to go on dungeon expeditions. Since he was already here, he needed to have a party.

'A dungeon raid can't be done in one day… '

It could take anywhere from a week to a month.

Even if one had helpful artifacts, artifacts couldn't be compared to an entire party.

A ranger capable of finding the fastest and safest path to somewhere and a mage with knowledge of esoteric languages and rune spells could be really helpful in the dungeon.

With his brain, I was sure it was difficult for Woo Hyo-Yeol to solve even basic puzzles, which was why he thought of many ways to grow stronger by himself, but…

'That all went down the drain.'

Why?

It was all because he had decided to come to Harizel.

He had no choice, as he already wasted a lot of time at the academy.

'It's not bad, though.'

There was no need for him to worry about keeping in touch with his comrades. Everyone would also go their separate ways after the raid as if they were employees at a company. I had to leave the Rohen Continent someday, so there was no point in making new connections, so this was a good thing for me as well.

'There's no point in getting close.'

"I'm sure I told you that I had business I needed to handle," he reminded me.

"Take care of your business. I have a lot of work as well," I said.

In the beginning, Kim Hyun-Sung had been wandering around a lot as well. He was killing his enemies and was doing his best to find the masked scum.

I was sure Woo Hyo-Yeol had a lot on his plate as well. Regressors were always busy in the beginning. I had no reason to get involved in his personal matters, nor did I want to get involved.

"…"

I wasn't sure if he was done talking to me or if I got on his nerves, but he stood up.

"…"

"Come back by 10 o'clock. I have things I need to tell you," I said.

"*Hmph,"* he scoffed, but it was a positive answer, which meant that he was somewhat interested.

"What… are you going to do?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“I’m going to head to the Adventurer Guild,” I replied.

‘I need to create a party.’

“I’m going to look for people and create a party with people that fit the requirements I mentioned earlier,” I said.

‘This asshole is leaving despite the fact that I’m still talking. He has no respect for his elders. I really need to teach him a lesson.’

“I’ll come back by 11 o’clock,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“What?”

“I’ll just listen to what you have to say,” he added.

“…”

He acted tough at the entrance before finally walking away.

I really felt like smacking him in the head.

‘He’s the type who requires a lot of attention.’

The way he fought reflected his personality.

It was meaningless to think that I could create a normal party with him.

Despite being a swordsman, he needed a lot of space, and his specialty was running rampant, so I was sure it was impossible for him to work with other vanguards.

His movements were based on instinct, and there weren’t many vanguards who could keep up with his unexpected movements.

Actually, it was safe to say there weren’t any vanguards like that out there. It was the same for the mages. I was sure some were worried that Woo Hyo-Yeol would reflect some of their spells toward them.

‘I should look for those with specialized roles.’

With my Mind’s Eye, it was an easy task.

My first real task was creating comrades for the regressor of Rohen, who was both distrustful and capable of trusting anyone at the same time.

I grabbed my belongings and headed outside.

I saw Woo Hyo-Yeol walking toward me.

“…”

“…”

“Let’s just…” Woo Hyo-Yeol paused.

“…”

“Let’s just meet at 10 o’clock,” he mumbled.

“Yes, sir!” I nodded while smiling.

‘We’re close now, right?’

“…”

‘We’re best friends now.’

---

1. Lee Ki-Young’s POV ☜

CHAPTER 1117
A COMRADE WHOSE TRUSTWORTHINESS IS UNCERTAIN (2)

Harizel had many similarities to other cities, and there wasn't really anything special about it. If it had been a carefully designed big city, it would have landmarks, a unique atmosphere, or unique features, but Harizel was just a small city that adventurers visited briefly before going to their destination.

There were people looking for parties and merchants selling items in the large square; corpses of monsters were hanging on hooks everywhere. I couldn't find any fancy restaurants or convenient facilities for the denizens. In addition…

'There aren't any cafes.'

All I could find in this small place was a pub, an inn for the adventurers, a blacksmith for item repairs, and shops that sold general goods. Clearly, this small city was created as a place to find jobs and a market for services rather than a place to live. The people walking on the streets were either adventurers or merchants. I couldn't find children running around or people sitting outside and enjoying a cup of coffee.

"I'm an experienced vanguard! I have a goblin hunting commission, and the reward is three gold! We can leave as soon as a mage joins. A Level 2 swordsman and archer are waiting here!"

"A Level 4 party is recruiting a melee adventurer to fill in for the day. We'll be checking your experience, equipment, job, and level!"

"We're looking for a priest! We welcome any level! We'll give you all the loot from the monster!"

“A Level 3 warrior is looking for a priest! You only need to be a Level 2 priest! I’ll be glad to answer any questions, so please come!”

“The Humble Rogue Familia is looking for people to join us! We’re still a small familia, but our GENIUS is generous and will not hesitate to offer support. We offer membership consultation, so let us know if you’re interested!”

‘Those places are usually traps. What kind of familia looks for members like this?’

The one thing that comforted me was that all of this was brand-new to me. Obviously, the architecture on the Rohen Continent and the architecture on our continent were different. The same went for the equipment and the monsters’ appearance.

Overall, the Rohen Continent’s architecture was similar to Roman architecture. Stone buildings were everywhere, and since there were a lot of GENIUSES, large and small temples were everywhere as well. Familia Houses looked similar to those temples.

The wooden buildings blended well with the surroundings, which meant that they didn’t look out of place.

‘There’s a lot of statues as well.’

Of course, I didn’t have the time to look around the city.

“Hey, hey! Take a look at our equipment! I’ll give you a good price!”

“Are you in a party? If you don’t, how about we talk…”

“Excuse me, could I ask which god you’re serving?”

‘Ah, why are there so many annoying people?’

The crowd rushed toward me as soon as I entered the square.

“I’m sorry,” I said.

“…”

“Excuse me,” I said.

The unique stench of the adventurers and the stench from monster by-products made it worse. I looked around to find a place to drink coffee, but I couldn’t find any cafes. I only had that cheap coffee that came with my breakfast at the inn…

‘I’d rather not drink anything.’

The Adventurer Guild was my destination anyway, so when I pushed myself through the square full of people, I soon found myself staring at a pretty plain Adventurer Guild.

There were many people here as well.

There were players trying to grab requests handled by the Adventurer Guild and players trying to find a party at the square. The only difference between the guild and the square was that the Adventurer Guild would make a party for you, which made things a lot more organized.

‘I can finally breathe.’

“Excuse me…” I said.

“Who’s this pale nerd?”

“What?” I asked.

“If you don’t want to get into any trouble, stop hanging around this place and leave. We’re not here to buy items,” a man warned.

‘What the hell is wrong with hairy over here? Move out of the way.’

“Oh no, I”m sorry. It sounds interesting, but I don’t know about this expedition. It seems kind of dangerous to take Nam Chang… Where are you from?” an adventurer asked.

‘Who the hell are you?’

“I don’t think I’ve seen you around here before… You’re new, right? I’d like to visit you later. Where do you—”

“It’s not like that,” I interrupted them.

“*Oh!* Oh my… I’m sorry.”

This was it.

There were many types of people here, so I ended up finding myself in many different situations. Some people were singing, while some were sitting on one side of the guild and were already drinking even though it was still early in the morning.

One thing they all had in common was that they were looking down on me.

There were many people laughing at me.

‘Is there something wrong with my outfit?’

I thought my outfit was pretty nice, but I seemed out of place compared to the other adventurers. This probably wouldn’t have happened if I had been wearing my priest outfit or something.

I was kind of upset, but it didn’t long for all of them to look my way.

They looked at me seriously when they heard someone calling out my name.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young?”

“*Ah!*”

“You’re here early. I’m sorry I couldn’t greet you earlier.”

“Are you… Miss Equia?” I asked.

“Yes, it’s nice to meet you,” Equia greeted.

“You really didn’t need to come all this way…” I told her.

“I received many things from the Flower and Fertility Familia. How could I neglect Mr. William’s family?” she replied.

‘Jealous of my connections?’

Obviously, I heard people talking about me. If they were the types of people who enjoyed listening to rumors, I was sure they had already heard of my name.

‘Have all of you already heard my name? I’m just that *great. I even know the manager of the Adventurer Guild.’*

“Please follow me,” Equia said.

“Thank you for your help,” I said.

I was soon led into a room used exclusively by Level 4 players. At least this place was a lot better than outside. It looked like a bar, and I saw a staff member looking like a bartender. Those looking at the bulletin board were taking their time reading the commissions, and unlike the people downstairs, these people easily formed parties.

Of course, the quality of the commissions here was different compared to the commissions downstairs.

The commissions were mostly about familias hiring an outsider before going on expeditions, dungeon investigations that people downstairs couldn’t even dream of obtaining and going hunting in a dangerous region that only Level 4 players ought to visit.

Most of them were commissions that the players downstairs would never be able to obtain.

“If… there’s anything you need…”

“Could I get a cup of coffee?” I asked.

“Sure,” Equia answered.

They also served coffee.

‘It’s a good thing I endured all that.’

The coffee was even delicious.

Level 4 players were equivalent to Epic players on our continent, so of course they were treated nicely. There was a difference in individual skills, but moving up from Rare was worth praising.

Moreover, Players below Level 3 couldn’t really work with Woo Hyo-Yeol.

‘He requires a lot of attention.’

In addition to recruiting party members, I had to be with them during raids. Now that I thought about it, Kim Hyun-Sung was a lot easier to deal with because he at least recruited Kim Ye-Ri and Jo Hye-Jin. Recruiting people to fight with him was the basics of being a regressor.

There was a reason he looked for Jung Ha-Yan as soon as he became a regressor.

‘Woo Hyo-Yeol doesn’t even have the basics down.’

He’d beat the heads of his rivals, but the dummy wasn’t planning on recruiting people he had met during his past life. No, he wasn’t planning on creating a party at all. He was actually wary of people and that was probably the reason why he was wary of William.

In that sense, we didn't need the heroes from his first life. Of course, it would be nice if we could recruit them, but the regressor of Rohen needed comrades who could help him grow mentally while keeping their distance from him rather than heroes.

'I can make up for the skills that they're lacking, and I have Mind's Eye, so I shouldn't have a problem looking for people.'

That was the reason I visited the Adventurer Guild. Players frequenting the Adventurer Guild at Level 4 usually had some sort of flaw. Many Epic adventurers back on our continent were part of a group as well. They were either part of a small clan or guild.

Epic adventurers not part of a group usually had flaws or had a heartbreaking backstory.

Some were betrayed by their group, others weren't accepted because of personality issues, or they had to have grown into useless people. In extreme cases, there were many players who couldn't endure being part of a group.

'I wouldn't have come here if I wanted to find normal people.'

I would have asked William for a recommendation or recruited people through normal means. Naturally, I looked around while taking a sip of my coffee and saw Level 4 players.

'Not bad… but I think they're already drunk.'

They could have been kicked out of a party because they were often drunk.

'Those who stopped growing are out as well.'

"You know… during my battle with three ogres… last time…"

'Arrogant assholes are no good as well.'

"I heard the rumors. So he's from the Flower and Fertility Familia?"

"…"

"If the Flower and Fertility Familia are recruiting people… I want to try talking to him…"

People interested in the Flower and Fertility Familia were no good either.

After checking their stats, jobs, nature, unique habit, item levels, and growth potential, I categorized all of them in my head. I also checked the people downstairs…

'Lonely Wolf as a unique habit doesn't sound so bad.'

Their nature was "Silent Thinker," which wasn't so bad either.

Of course, this was going to take me some time, so I sat quietly, hoping that there would be one person who would catch my attention. While I was in the process of sorting out the best and second-best options, someone from downstairs came up.

"…"

"…"

'He's a veteran.'

I could tell without using Mind's Eye. He had a belt that could hold his equipment, weapons, and consumables. He also had a secondary weapon attached to the belt for emergency use.

Despite the fact that his equipment looked old, it seemed like he took good care of his items, which was another plus. He was meticulous, and it was a rare trait among players. One ought to know how to take care of their items, especially when one was clad in plate armor just like the veteran before me.

At first glance, item maintenance seemed useless, but it could increase your chance of survival. He had a good personality as well, and his unique habit

seemed normal, so I couldn't understand why he was here…

'Why are you here?'

'I like him.'

I was sure had his reasons for coming here, and I immediately figured out why.

'He's too… '

"…"

'He's too old.'

He was an old warrior with a white beard and a bed of slicked-back white hair.

CHAPTER 1118
A COMRADE WHOSE TRUSTWORTHINESS IS UNCERTAIN (3)

The small and deep wounds on his face caught my attention.

The traces of countless battles and life-or-death situations all over him made him look cool. I could tell that he was a veteran without looking at the condition of his armor or equipment. He deserved to be applauded for surviving this long.

It was a shame he didn't have enough mana to stop himself from aging, but mana wasn't really important when it came to being a vanguard.

Even our pig had a tiny bit of mana. If he had enough mana, he wouldn't have problems working as an excellent vanguard. Of course, Park Deok-Gu and the gramps were slightly different from each other.

'His stats… are already decreasing.'

He had to have realized that fact long ago, as he was working out really hard, but he couldn't stop his body from aging.

He was doing a great job at taking care of himself, and he managed to slow down the speed of his stat degradation to the minimum. He was probably all muscle beneath his armor, and since he was tall and had been working as a vanguard, he had a really large frame. Rather than trying to make up for whatever he lacked, he was trying to overcome his old age by doing other things.

His physique, which made the younger players look weak, was one of the things that made him look like a veteran. Of course, he couldn't be compared to Bahamut, who was Epic, but that kind of physique at his age was basically

a miracle.

Even if one had buffs or blessings, maintaining that kind of form was nearly impossible. Looking at his overall stats, he definitely couldn't be underestimated, but he was already seventy-one years old.

'Will he work?'

I couldn't help but question it.

His glory days were over a long time ago. Even if he managed to make up for the things he lacked through experience and other means, making him grow to become suitable for an Epic party was almost impossible, and this was the harsh reality before him.

He could be useful temporarily, but there was an issue with turning him into a permanent party member. Of course, he had advantages, and they were more than just his stats.

'I can roleplay as his grandson.'

A grandfather and his grandson show could probably melt Woo Hyo-Yeol's cold heart. I was sure that guy grew up without parents, so there was nothing better than that in helping him regain his humanity.

I was certain that the story between the old warrior and Lee Ki-Young, who was running out of time to live, was going to be better than any other stories I had written so far.

'That's right. If I just wanted to find someone talented, I wouldn't have come here to begin with.'

What mattered was their character and story…

If I wanted to create a story with a party that was limited to four to five members, the old warrior was needed. We could become closer by playing the grandfather and grandson role, and our bond would grow deeper over

time.

'I can give him a retirement fund and have him retire at the right time.'

It'd be ideal to take him with us all the way, but it wouldn't matter. He'd be the elderly member of our party, and like in movies, he was perfect for the wise old man role who would appear from time to time.

He'd give useful advice to the young members and ultimately play the role of bringing us together. That was the right way of using the old warrior before me.

I felt like it was worth talking to him, so I was going to approach him, but…

'Hm.'

I didn't think that this was the right way to approach him.

There had to be a reason why he was active on the frontlines despite his age.

He probably couldn't find a permanent party because of his age, but Level 4 players weren't *that* strong that they could look down on a veteran like him. I was sure many parties preferred an experienced veteran like him to an energetic young player who could easily become a liability.

There was definitely a reason why he didn't want to create a party. He didn't seem obsessed with money or honor. I thought perhaps he was betrayed by his previous permanent party, but his mental fortitude wasn't so low that he would let something like that affect him.

'Raymond Bolt.'

"Mr… Raymond Bolt…" I mumbled.

"…"

"…"

For now, I decided to leave.

After blending in with the people, I walked up to someone.

“Miss Equia,” I called out.

“Yes, Mr. Lee Ki-Young? Are you… done taking care of your business already?” Equia asked.

“No, it’s not that… I forgot I had other things to take care of. If you don’t mind, could I borrow your office?” I requested.

“Of course, but…” Equia answered hesitantly.

“I need to send Mr. William a letter,” I told her.

“*Hahaha*, then of course you can use my office. But… why aren’t you using the Communication Artifact…” Equia asked.

I still couldn’t trust this city’s communication channel. There was a warp gate, so it wouldn’t take long to deliver it to him.

“*Ah!* I’m sorry. Looks like I crossed the line. Please forget it,” Equia said.

“It’s fine. So…”

“Head right, and it’ll be the second room. I’ll have someone send your letter,” Equia informed me.

The goal was obvious.

‘I just want to be more thorough.’

[Dear Mr. William.]

‘This must be the start of the letter. I’ll start with a nice introduction and thank him for his help. I’ll talk about the things I’ve been up to and then go straight to the point.’

[If you don't mind, could you look into Mr. Raymond Bolt? He's a Level 4 adventurer of the Adventurer Guild. Please don't ask me any questions. I feel bad for constantly making requests like this… but I hope you'll help me with this.]

[Wishing you endless joy and fortune.]

[Sincerely, Lee Ki-Young]

This had to be good enough. If I could, I would write more—like four to five pages more—but I didn't have the luxury of time, so the letter had to be short.

To be honest, I was just getting paid for things I had done for them. When considering the amount of consultation that I had provided for the Flower and Fertility Familia, this request wouldn't be a problem for him.

William seemed to have thought the same thing as me because his reply was faster than I thought.

[Dear Mr. Lee Ki-Young.]

'I'll skip the introduction, the part where he's expressing his gratitude and the things he's been up to.'

[I'll investigate the Level 4 adventurer, Raymond Bolt, and I will send you the details as soon as possible.]

[Wishing you endless joy and fortune.]

[Sincerely, William Froud.]

'I hope he doesn't take too long.'

I was sure it wouldn't take him long to investigate a Level 4 adventurer. It'd be a different story if Raymond Bolt had his own army or a hidden evil army, but from my perspective, large familias had their own information network.

With that in mind, they'd surely obtain lots of information about Raymond Bolt in just a day or two.

If I were to hire a Level 5 ranger to follow Raymond Bolt, I would surely be able to obtain useful information about him. However, waiting for that information was kind of a waste of time. Of course, I could look for people in the meantime and accomplish the other tasks on my plate.

William's next letter arrived exactly five hours and thirty minutes later. I skipped all the parts that he had mentioned in his previous letter.

[It seemed urgent, so I sent you a reply as soon as possible. Here's the information I found about the Level 4 adventurer, Raymond Bolt. I couldn't figure out exactly when he was summoned here, but he has experience working in the large city of Zaun.

[Interestingly enough, he's a player who wields a large crossbow and shield. It doesn't say whether he signed a contract with a GENIUS or not, but he has experience working with the Shaded Sun Crown Familia.]

[The Shaded Sun Crown Familia was a prestigious mid-sized familia, but they disbanded after a major failure during an expedition six years ago. At the time, only six survivors, including Raymond Bolt, returned from the dungeon called the Tower of Pain.

[Exactly thirty-three people had died, and that expedition was the main reason why the familia ended up disbanding. Raymond Bolt went into hiding after that. He was missing for three whole years before mysteriously reappearing in Harizel.]

'It's pretty thorough despite the last-minute request.'

They were information I could find if I searched for it. I could look through the logs of the Adventurer Guild or make use of an information guild within the city. Anyway, I felt like I had an idea about why he preferred to work alone.

The expedition in the Tower of Pain had to be the reason behind it. He had lost all his comrades, who were like family to him, and I was sure he didn't want to experience that again. He probably thought that keeping his distance was the best option, and he had to have decided that he would no longer make a permanent party.

It was also possible that other things had happened inside the dungeon.

'The rest of the letter is even better.'

It contained a lot of information, from Raymond Bolt's hunting grounds to the commissions he had accepted since arriving in Harizel. There were also miscellaneous pieces of information, like where he had purchased his equipment as well as his favorite meals. These were things I would never find out unless I followed him for a long time.

[Upon reviewing the commissions that Raymond Bolt had accepted, he often accepted commissions related to Felkan Village or commissions that required him to pass through that village. Felkan Village is a village located not too far from Harizel…]

[As a result, I found out that he's been donating to the orphanage located in that village.]

'This is it.'

I saw other information about him but only read the ones I found useful. I wasn't sure if the other pieces of information would be useful, but I thought that this was a start.

'This is it.'

It had to be really hard to make a living these days, but the old man was kind-hearted. Was he even saving for his retirement? I couldn't help but think that this was a good situation for me.

And a few days later…

“Hyung!”

“Hyung!”

“Oppa!” Over here! Over here!”

I couldn’t help but visit the orphanage at Felkan Village.

‘Volunteer work is my specialty.’

“All right, calm down guys. Can you wait for me?” I asked.

“Okay!”

“Okay!”

Obviously, it didn’t take long for me to meet the old man who often visited the orphanage.

“Grandpa!”

“You’re here!”

“You’re…” the old man said.

“…”

“…”

“I-It’s nice to meet you, sir,” I greeted.

I displayed my most innocent and bright smile as sweat rolled down my youthful face.

CHAPTER 1119
A COMRADE WHOSE TRUSTWORTHINESS IS UNCERTAIN (4)

"…"

"…"

"So…"

"Yes, and I just happened to end up in this place. To reach the southern region, I need to pass through Felkan Village. Of course, the southern region isn't known for its hunting grounds… but I wanted to see for myself," I explained.

"I see. You're right…" Raymond commented.

"It wasn't my intention to startle you, Mr. Raymond Bolt," I said.

"It's fine. I wasn't startled. I was just surprised because I've never seen you before. Don't worry about my initial reaction too much. I… I should actually be thanking you," Raymond reassured me.

"You don't need to thank—"

"*Haha*…" Raymond laughed. He seemed a bit calmer now.

'He must have never imagined that someone else would be here.'

Perhaps it was because this place was located on the outskirts of the village, but people usually wouldn't visit this place. It applied to busy adventurers and busy villagers, who were too busy working to look after the orphans here.

To make matters worse, the orphanage was located in a remote place instead of within a big city.

This was why I needed to give a reasonable explanation. My presence here was strange when I had been working in Harizel. My story was that I accepted a commission, and I stopped by this small village. In order to rest, I made a reservation at an inn, but I saw children running around, and coincidentally found an orphanage in Felkan Village.

I wasn't lying. I actually arrived here a few days ago to create a fateful encounter under the guise of a coincidence. I meticulously orchestrated this event with that in mind. Aside from the fact that the commission was fake, everything was true. Of course…

'Being suspicious of me is pretty shocking.'

If I were that old man, I would question myself.

'But there's no reason to question me in the first place.'

I was an adventurer with a bright future, so why would I sneak into an orphanage and harm these children? Of course, he didn't think that I was after him.

The idea that Lee Ki-Young, who had received an offer from the Flower and Fertility Familia, had orchestrated this kind of situation to recruit a seventy-one-year-old retired veteran warrior was more ridiculous than saying that I was trying to cause harm to the orphanage.

Moreover…

'I'm a professional when it comes to volunteer work.'

Getting along with children was the basics of the basics, and I was used to handling the remaining tasks at the orphanage. Doing the children's laundry, helping with making food, and other trivial tasks were my specialty.

It was easy to sweat, not complain, and make it look like I was simply doing this because I wanted to do so. I also cast simple holy spells to treat the wounds of the children. I wrapped my hand around a child's hand filled with pus and cast a holy spell…

'I even think I look like a saint.'

The old man was kind of surprised when he first saw me, but he really put down his guard at some point. He was known to not make connections with other people, but opening his heart ended up being a piece of cake.

"Mr. Raymond Bolt… how did you end up here…" I asked.

"*Ah*, the same way you ended up here. I had business in Felkan Village so I visited, and these children stole my heart," Raymond answered.

"I see."

"Alsiphon was the one who dragged me here. Can you believe it? He was trying to steal from me, and not only that, but he was a lot smaller back then. He was probably this tall… It's probably because he thought I was a dying old man.

"Anyway, I wanted to see his parents, so I came here, right? Alsiphon?"

"I-I really thought you were just an ordinary old man back then. You weren't even wearing armor back then…" Alsiphon answered.

"*Hahaha.* So are you saying you did nothing wrong?" Raymond questioned.

"I-I know what I did was wrong, but I had no choice back then. I… had to… take care of my… younger siblings. In the end, I did the right thing because we're able to live together like this thanks to you. After my older sister disappeared…" Alsiphon said.

"Alsiphon."

"*Ah,* then… in the beginning…" I paused.

"Yeah, there wasn't anyone here, hyung. And we didn't live in a nice house like this. This place changed a lot after he came. It's all… thanks to him," Alsiphon said.

"You're embarrassing me, kid. You can stop now and get ready to eat," Raymond told him.

Alsiphon was acting cute in front of Raymond Bolt.

'Ah… that's what I should be doing.'

Raymond also patted Alsiphon's head.

"I'm happy for the children," I commented.

"You're right. It is a good thing," Raymond agreed.

'It's perfect.'

I was relieved that he wasn't that different from what I had imagined. If he turned out to be a foul-mouthed old man, I would be a bit surprised. Of course, I had already deduced his personality based on the information that I had received from William, but meeting and talking to him was completely different.

'He seems open-minded as well.'

At least, he wasn't like the gramps who were trying to take over the Blue Guild.

He was an old gentleman with great manners. He wasn't regretting the past too much and he had a lot of stories to tell. He was simply waiting for the day of his demise as well. He obviously had no regrets in life, except for this orphanage.

“It worked out. It worked out for everyone,” Raymond commented.

“…”

“That also includes meeting you,” Raymond added.

“What?”

“Think about it. How long do you think I have to live? I’m not trying to hand you the burden, but it’s really comforting to know that there’s another person who can look after the children,” Raymond answered.

‘Look at this old man. He’s trying to hand over his responsibility. This is only our first meeting.’

“I’m not trying to pressure you. When you live in a place like this, it’s not easy to take your time and look around. I was the same way in the past…” Raymond said.

“…”

“Just knowing there’s someone who will visit them occasionally when they have time or when they think of them… I’m sure the children will find that fact to be quite comforting,” Raymond added.

“I see.”

“Just think of it as an old man getting a little overexcited,” he said.

He had a soft side as well. It was also a sign that I made a good impression. Even if he was saying those things out of courtesy, it’s not easy saying those things to someone you’ve just met, especially on a continent where people were slowly losing their humanity and people were becoming untrustworthy.

‘This is why you need to leave a good impression.’

A bright smile, an innocent look, and a face that seemed to be carrying all the innocence and the purity of the entire world. Acting like I was ignorant was a plus as well.

I had yet to be tainted by the Rohen Continent. I was just summoned here and had just exited the Beginner's Trial, so I still had my innocent side. I was protecting my humanity while showing the GENIUSES everything I had to offer.

He probably thought that I was shining brightly.

Yeah, I was like… I was like the Master of the Shaded Sun Crown Familia. I was like Isabel Sunstrider.

'He should've caught on by now.'

"…"

'I guess not.'

I smiled and lowered my head slightly.

'How about now?'

I made eye contact with the people talking to me and nodded at them with a smile.

'I'll open my eyes wide.'

'How's this?'

I grabbed onto the necklace containing my family's photo. These were Isabel Sunstrider's habits. They were information I obtained from the remaining survivors of the Shaded Sun Crown Familia.

Although they were small habits, I was sure they were enough to remind him of her.

'He was close to her, so he should catch on.'

In fact, this orphanage was part of Isabel Sunstrider's legacy.

'Saying that he coincidentally found this place was a lie… '

I was sure he knew that Isabel was secretly helping the children in Felkan Village.

Actually, I could be wrong, but the fact was that he eventually discovered it.

He could have discovered it from the children or had figured it out through various hints.

The orphanage was probably the biggest reason Raymond Bolt was able to stand back on his feet after losing everyone in his family and living a wretched life.

Just as he was about to give up everything, he coincidentally found the orphans, and he got involved after realizing that they had a connection with Isabel Sunstrider.

The Felkan orphanage became his driving force to live, his legacy, and his everything after losing many things. It was safe to say this was the only connection he had left to the late Isbael Sunstrider.

The old man looked like he was reminiscing about the old days.

'He's smiling. The old man is happy.'

He definitely noticed something. Obviously, it wasn't easy to form a bond with someone one had just met, and it was especially true for an old warrior who had experienced the hardships that life had to offer.

'This was intercepting his bond.'

Not really. This wasn't an interception. It was more like I was continuing

Isabel Sunstrider's will and legacy. He probably wanted that as well. No, I was sure he wanted that.

'Are you watching, Isabel Sunstrider?'

'The emotional old man is starting to cry.'

"Mr. Raymond Bolt?" I called out.

"It's nothing. Something just got in my eye," Raymond said.

What if Isabel Sunstrider were still alive? I was sure he was thinking about that question.

"Right. So you said your name was Lee Ki-Young, right?" Raymond asked.

"That's right," I replied.

"When… were you summoned here?" Raymond asked.

"I completed the Beginner's Trial, graduated from the academy, and immediately came to Harizel… so it's been less than two months," I answered.

"…"

"…"

"I don't know much about you, but I've heard things about you," Raymond said.

"What? About… me?" I asked.

"*Hahaha.* You really aren't familiar with the things happening in the world. The information guild in Rohen is really advanced… so rumors spread rather quickly.

"GENIUSES and gossipers who enjoy rumors make a living by spreading

rumors about you in pubs and squares. You're a competent young man, after all. I'm saying that you're a talented player capable of entering the mainstream," Raymond answered.

"Exactly what kind of rumor…" I asked.

"I think they're calling you 'Genius Commander,' and they said that you rejected offers from many major familias…" Raymond replied.

"…"

"…"

"I never imagined that there would be such rumors about me…" I replied.

"Can I ask why you made that choice?" Raymond asked.

"…"

"*Ah!* I don't mean anything by it. It's just… I'm curious as to why you rejected such a good offer when you have such a bright future," Raymond said.

"…"

"…"

The answer was already there because I was aware of the line that Isabel Sunstrider often said.

"It's just…" I paused.

"…"

"I'm not really sure. I just… didn't want to leave just like that. I…" I paused again.

"…"

‘Pause.’

“I just want to be someone who can shine a light on things I can see,” I continued.

This line would surely elicit tears from an old man who had been living to keep his memories alive.

CHAPTER 1120
A COMRADE WHOSE TRUSTWORTHINESS IS UNCERTAIN (5)

Old Warrior Trait 1: Full of regrets…

Old Warrior Trait 2: Wants to correct past mistakes…

This old man was living in the present, but the ghost of his past was still haunting him. It wasn't something he could just talk to anyone about, but I could see that he was still consumed by what happened in the Tower of Pain.

Isabel Sunstrider's legacy had appeared out of nowhere.

Obviously, she and I were different, and our signature lines were different as well. Isabel Sunstrider's famous line was, "I just want to be someone who can shine a light on those who stand in the shadows."

However, it would be kind of strange if I used the same line as hers, so I said a line that held a similar meaning, and it was very effective.

The old man was immediately consumed by his memories, and regardless of his own will, tears welled up in his emotional eyes. He was likely recalling his first meeting with Isabel Sunstrider or the memories he had with her.

He could probably hear Isabel saying "Grandpa!" in his head. To add to that, I was sure that his memories with her were playing in his head like a panorama.

'Come back to reality, gramps.'

"…"

"…"

"Mr. Raymond Bolt?" I said.

"It's…" Raymond paused.

"Yes?"

"It's nothing. I just got… dust in my eyes," Raymond continued.

'How can you get dust in your eyes when the wind isn't blowing? Those are classic words.'

It was a good thing that it wasn't raining.

"Are you okay?" I asked.

"I'm okay. I'm fine… I'm fine…" Raymond answered.

'Do I need to give him time to recover mentally?'

He was already lost in his memories. He was looking into the distance, seemingly in a daze. It had to have been hard for him to look ahead as he was staring at the ground to hide his face from me.

However, the way his shoulders were shaking told me that he was feeling emotional.

"Mr. Raymond Bolt…" I mumbled.

"It's… nothing… Raymond said.

Had he finally realized that he was acting out character in front of Flower Ki-Young, who could be his grandson?

'At least he's mentally healthy.'

I'd understand if he started crying because I was sure he was in denial right

now.

‘That child isn’t her.’

He probably thought something along those lines.

It was an undeniable fact that I was intercepting the bond he had with her, but it didn’t take long for the old man to come back to his senses.

As an old man with a ton of life experience, it seemed like he was able to calm down his racing heart and confusion. He was aware that Isabel and I were two different people, and we had no connections with each other.

I was sure there were things he wanted to say to her, but regardless of how much he cared about her, thinking that she and I were the same person was completely meaningless, and he knew it wasn’t good to think that way.

Despite that, he couldn’t forget about Isabel Sunstrider.

Our behavior, expression, and personality were similar, including the fact that we were shining brightly.

I hadn’t done much research on her, but I knew the most important information about her, and it was her nature. Her nature was an idealist.

She believed that the world was warm and filled with light and that everyone thought the same way as her. In fact, the Shaded Sun Crown Familia was a group of followers who were captivated by her will, and as she said, she was like the sun that warmly illuminated those in the shadow.

In other words, we had many similarities.

One of them was the fact that she had yet to realize the truth that evil existed in the world. She’d blame the evil she had seen on the environment rather than the people.

She believed that if good people came together and spread goodness to the

world, the world would change. She dreamed that one small flap of her wings could change the continent.

I was sure the Shaded Sun Crown Familia had suffered a lot because of her nature, and Isabel herself likely had to endure a ton of injustice and malice. The reason a mid-sized familia that had the potential to become a major familia stopped growing at some point was hidden somewhere there.

Like many other idealists, she was well-liked, but her surroundings weren't helping her at all.

"I should… get going now, Mr. Raymond Bolt," I said.

"Already? Is something wrong?" Raymond asked.

"As I mentioned earlier, I need to start heading south," I replied.

"To the south?" Raymond asked.

"Yes."

"…"

"…"

"Hey," Raymond said.

"Yes?"

And that was why Grandpa Raymond just couldn't leave Flower Ki-Young alone…

"If… you don't mind, could you tell me what kind of commission you accepted?" Raymond asked.

"Of course. It's a simple herb-gathering commission," I answered.

"Herb gathering…" he mumbled.

“That’s right. I’m actually interested in herbal medicine. Of course, it’s nothing to brag about, but I studied a bit when I was at the academy, and personally… I like herbs,” I told him.

“What about your other party members?” Raymond asked.

“Party members?”

“I’m talking about the other party members who agreed to work with you. Where are they? Are they back at the inn?” Raymond asked.

“*Ah…*”

“Are you… are you trying to enter the forest alone?” Raymond questioned.

“To be exact, I’m not trying to enter the forest. I heard the entrance has been stabilized… and monsters rarely appear there. I did some research before coming here, so you don’t have to worry,” I reassured him.

“…”

“Arnia Leaves are usually found on the outskirts rather than inside the forest, and that includes Mego Mushrooms and Talina Roots. Those are all the items listed on the commission and the guild actually…”

‘Yeah, I know I sound ridiculous right now, so don’t look at me like that, gramps.’

“I… don’t know what to say… Were you really thinking about going alone?” Raymond asked.

“*Huh?* Yes…” I answered.

“Aside from the monsters, did you know there are wild herbs near the southern forest?” Raymond asked.

“What?”

“What I’m saying is that players like you and bandits are roaming around targeting merchants. They’re not just petty thugs. They’ve grown into a formidable group. Did you check to see who made the commission?

“Even if the Adventurer’s Guild has notarized it, you shouldn’t think all missions are normal missions. That’s the same for commissions notarized by familias as well. The thugs in the mountain could have actually made the commission,” Raymond explained.

“T-That can’t be,” I stuttered.

“I know it sounds like I’m exaggerating, but it has happened on the Rohen Continent before. A similar incident occurred a few years ago. What are you going to do about the monsters that will definitely appear outside the forest upon being abandoned by their group?

“And What if you get lost? Have you thought about what you’ll do if you encounter a group of bad people or slave merchants?” Raymond questioned.

“I haven’t…” I mumbled.

“*Wheeew…* I can’t believe you thought of this as a simple herb-gathering commission… and… came all the way here alone,” Raymond said.

Flower Ki-Young had learned about the Rohen Continent through books.

“But—”

“And your armor is in a pretty poor state,” Raymond interrupted me.

“…”

“I want to ask if you have a way of protecting yourself,” Raymond asked.

“I do… have a sword… but I left it in my room…” I replied.

“What’s your level… Did you advance your job to a swordsman?” Raymond

asked.

“I’m Level 2… and a priest…” I answered.

“But you’re wielding a sword. Consider yourself lucky that it’s still on you. And let me give you some advice. If someone asks for your level, don’t tell them so easily like that.

“Don’t tell them anything that could give them clues about your abilities, and the same goes for your equipment. You shouldn’t just show off your newly bought equipment like that. Are you trying to tell people that you’re a wanderer?” Raymond questioned.

‘What the hell do you want me to do?’

“*Whoo…”* Raymond sighed.

I couldn’t help but lower my head.

I was just a young boy with a dream.

Many people praised Flower Ki-Young for being a genius, but he was just a rookie who knew nothing about the world.

I was sure the old warrior thought I was going to lose my life soon.

It wasn’t going to happen right now, but he was almost certain that I would lose my life if he were to leave me alone. Normally, he wouldn’t interfere in something like this because the old warrior wasn’t a fan of forming a deep bond with others, but this was different.

‘He can’t leave me alone.’

Isabel Sunstrider and I were two completely different people and had no relationship with each other at all, so Raymond Bolt had no reason to worry about me, but…

'He can't leave me alone.'

"Lead the way," Raymond said.

"What?"

"I'll help you until you complete this commission," Raymond said.

"I-I don't want to trouble you with this. I appreciate the offer, but I'll complete this on my own, Mr. Raymond Bolt," I told him.

"Didn't you hear me just now? You don't know anything. Of course, I heard rumors about you being smart and that people have high expectations, but the world isn't what you think. I'm sure this looks like a simple commission, but there are many things you need to worry about. An expedition is…"

'Yeah, yeah.'

"Actually, let me give you some advice. If you want to work on the Rohen Continent and survive until the end, avoid working alone as much as possible. I won't say anything cliche like, 'Join a familia,' or anything like that, but it's important to at least have comrades who will have your back," Raymond continued.

'That's what I'm doing right now, Gramps. Getting trustworthy comrades.'

"No matter how small a task may be… it's important to share and overcome them together," Raymond added.

'Yes, yes, of course.'

"Gather your belongings," Raymond instructed.

"B-But I don't want to… trouble you…" I mumbled.

"*Whoo*, then let's do this," Raymond said.

"…"

"I'm actually free right now, so how about we create a temporary party? I don't know how to look for herbs, and you don't have a way of protecting yourself, so let's split the reward in half. Will you feel less burdened?" Raymond asked.

"…"

"…"

"What do you think?" he asked.

"W-Well, when you say it like that…" I said.

"…"

"…"

"Thank you, Grandpa Raymond," I said.

"…!"

'Oh no, I made a mistake.'

"I-I mean… Mr. Raymond Bolt. I'm sorry. It just came out…" I apologized.

"…"

"You suddenly… reminded me of my grandfather back on Earth," I told him.

Of course, it was a white lie because I had no grandfather.

"*Haha…*"

"…"

"*Hahaha!*" Raymond laughed.

“Again, I-I’m sorry, Mr. Raymond Bolt,” I said.

“It’s fine,” Raymond said.

“Excuse me?”

“You can call me whatever you want. It doesn’t matter to me,” Raymond answered.

Despite saying that, the old warrior was smiling faintly. He looked as if he was looking at his actual grandson.

‘He’ll get a heart attack if I tell him I’m going to die in three years.’

Of course, that was a small secret of mine. The boy, driven by purity and resolve, sang a hymn about humanity while quietly bearing a small but painful secret.

It was a very small secret… that people couldn’t find out.

“O-Okay…” I answered.

CHAPTER 1121
A COMRADE WHOSE TRUSTWORTHINESS IS UNCERTAIN (6)

"So?" Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

"So that's how we met. It was a coincidence. After that, we headed south, gathered those herbs, and returned. The things Raymond was worried about didn't happen… but thanks to him…" I paused.

"Is that all you have to tell me?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

'This jerk is being a huge asshole. Why does he complain about every single thing?'

"Once he's officially registered as part of our guild's party, he won't be active out there, but he'll become the vanguard of our party.

"Gramps… I mean, Mr. Raymond Bolt is kind of too old to be active in the field, but he has a lot of experience and knowledge. In addition to battles, I think he can be really helpful in other fields. Of course, his overall combat prowess is pretty good, so… you shouldn't look down on him," I explained.

"And?"

"Well, what about you? Did you manage to take care of your business?" I asked.

"Why do I need to tell you that?" Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

'If you don't want to tell me, then just leave me alone. Why are you sitting around here? It looks like you're done eating. I really want to flick his forehead.'

If he weren't a pessimist, could it be that he had some kind of disease that forced him to make negative comments? I couldn't get a positive answer from him, and I felt like throwing my coffee at his face.

'No, no. He did change a lot.'

I tried my best to look at the positive things, which helped me calm my anger a bit.

Actually, the fact that he was still in the room right now proved that my work so far had been effective. Although he talked like an asshole as if it were a passive skill, he listened to me in the end.

'It's because I haven't seen him in a while. I knew this was the kind of person he was, but I must've stopped getting used to it.'

Despite being far away, he had yet to leave Harizel, and it was surprising that we were staying in the same inn. In his past life, I was sure there wasn't really a place he could go back to and call it a day. It wasn't like he would go to a different city and return.

He would just stay at an inn in that city.

When going on an expedition, he would get a separate room, and he was used to sleeping outside when necessary. Seeing that he attended these small meetings was proof that Woo Hyo-Yeol was going to return to the inn in Harizel.

I somewhat succeeded in providing a house that the wild dog could protect.

"Let me tell you something while we're talking about it," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"Yes?"

"Just because I'm here spending time with you doesn't mean that I'm going to listen to you. Just because I'm playing along with you right now doesn't mean I'm going to do things with you," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"…"

"Yeah, a chance. I'm giving you a chance," Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

'Even now, he's trying to give me control little by little.'

I clearly remembered him saying that he had business to take care of when we first arrived in Harizel, but now he was giving me a chance. I remembered him warning me a few days ago that we weren't working together, but now, he wanted us to try working together.

If Woo Hyo-Yeol had any plans of doing what he had been saying to me, he would have gotten up and left a long time ago to take care of them.

I could exclude the possibility of him moving around busily because he regretted the time he had lost due to the academy and Harize. If he really were thinking about escaping, he wouldn't say those things to me.

'He would just stay quiet.'

Guys with no intention of leaving in the first place tended to talk a lot.

"What? A seventy-one-year-old grandpa?" Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

"…"

"I'm not here to watch you guys play house. Executing that grand plan of yours will be hard even if you manage to gather the top players on the continent right now.

"And you want to recruit who? It's none of my business, but if you're trying to recruit him out of pity, then I want you to keep me out of it. If you want to play as his grandson, then go do it elsewhere," Woo Hyo-Yeol complained.

"That's not it," I said.

"What?"

“I’m not recruiting Mr. Raymond Bolt out of pity or because of the connection we made in that short period of time. He simply meets all the conditions. It’s not like he doesn’t have any weaknesses, but he met my conditions,” I told him.

“…”

“…”

“I know you’re more experienced than players who have recently graduated from the academy. You may think that you don’t need him, but it’s rare to find people with the same level of experience as Mr. Raymond Bolt.

“You can’t ignore the wisdom of a veteran who had been surviving on this continent for such a long time. A tank capable of doing ranged attacks is rare as well. He’s also a Level 4 veteran warrior. As a Level 3, do you really think you’re qualified to judge him?” I questioned.

“…”

“You don’t have to worry about his combat skills. His stats are decreasing, but it’s not very noticeable, and since he’s a Level 4 warrior, his basic combat skills are pretty high.

“I think it’s better to recruit him than someone with no skills. At least… at least Mr. Raymond Bolt’s stats won’t decrease further within the next three years,” I continued.

‘I’m not trying to help him grow stronger. I’m just using him temporarily. It’s not like our party is going to stay together forever, so what are you worried about? You weren’t thinking about staying together for a long time, were you?’

“And… I’m sorry… for calling him Gramps. He just reminded me of my grandfather… so I said it without realizing it…” I added.

“…”

“My grandfather raised me… because I didn’t have parents,” I revealed.

The atmosphere became awkward.

“…”

“I failed to keep my personal and professional life separate,” I said.

“…”

“…”

“*Hmph.*”

“…”

“You can call him whatever you want, and I don’t care if he reminds you of your dead grandfather. What I’m worried about is the atmosphere,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“…”

“Let me make myself clear. I wasn’t worried about that in the first place,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“I won’t make unreasonable decisions under the swaying of my emotions. I’ll keep things professional,” I reassured him.

“I’ll hold you to that,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“*Ah!* There’s also something I forgot to mention… I’m thinking about going on an expedition soon,” I informed him.

“…”

“It’ll be a dungeon raid,” I revealed.

“…”

“I think doing a dungeon raid will give us more noticeable results than taking on commissions or going hunting… I already looked at potential places, and I’m collecting the items we need and pieces of information. We’ll need more people, though…” I informed him.

“And the date?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“As soon as possible. At least in a month, no, within a week…” I replied.

“That’s not bad. If there’s nothing else, I’ll be getting up now,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“S-Sure, and also—”

“Damn it. *Whoo…* do you have more things to talk about with me?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“It’s about potions,” I told him.

“…”

“I made one with the herbs I got recently. It seems to be more effective than the ones sold in the market, so you should take it,” I said.

“…”

Woo Hyo-Yeol stared at the potion that the continent’s best alchemist had shyly offered to him. After a moment, he accepted it and placed it into his bag.

‘We talked a lot today, right? I think we made a connection, too.’

Obviously, he didn’t thank me, but…

“If I find someone decent, I’ll bring them,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“What?”

“Someone who will be useful as a party member,” he clarified.

“…”

“Don’t expect too much,” Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

With that, he slammed the door shut and left, ending our short meeting.

Soon, I heard a voice from upstairs.

“*Tsk.* What a rebellious young man,” Raymond commented.

“…” “*Ah!* Gramps!” I greeted.

“Is that the young man you told me about?” Raymond asked.

“Yes. His name is Woo Hyo-Yeol. He’s a Level 3 swordsman and—”

“Why…” he interrupted me.

‘Why did I make a party with him? I don’t know either.’

However, I had to answer him “properly,” as Woo Hyo-Yeol could be listening to us from outside. Actually, he was definitely listening to us. I could imagine him acting cool by leaning on the wall.

“He’s a little rough around the edges, but he’s a kind person. He just isn’t the type to express his emotions…” I explained.

“*Haha…*”

‘Pretty ridiculous, right? I know.’

“He just needs some time. More importantly, take this. You said you were going hunting today, right?” I asked.

“…”

“It’s a potion. It’ll be more effective than the ones sold in the market,” I told him.

“Thanks for this… but is it okay for me to just take it…” Raymond asked.

“You said you would help me for the time being, so it’s my way of returning the favor. Consider it a bribe,” I answered.

“*Haha*. This is such a cute bribe,” Raymond commented and lowered his head in apparent embarrassment. So far, we had worked together for a grand total of once, but he reached for my head and patted it as if he had long gotten used to it.

I was surprised that we managed to build a bond this deep just by harvesting some herbs, but it was all thanks to my warm-hearted nature.

Talking about many different things while completing the commission was a bonus.

Based on my lore as Flower Ki-Young, I had no parents, and my grandfather raised me by himself. In other words, Raymond was the only person I could rely on. When we were talking about our life back on Earth, I was sure Raymond’s heart broke.

Of course, I had to make the stories sound dramatic. The boy was bullied at a young age for not having parents, and he had to work many jobs to support his younger sister.

He matured at a young age, but he didn’t lose any hope in the world.

After meeting a sponsor… I mean, a trustworthy friend… I worked hard and studied, got a scholarship, and was accepted into college.

When the story ended, I was already Raymond Bolt’s grandson.

“By the way… you haven’t changed your mind? Are you sure?” Raymond asked.

“Yes,” I answered.

“…”

“Of course, I’m grateful that you’re worried about me, but I’m just doing what’s right…” I added.

“But-”

“I’ll avoid danger as much as possible, so you don’t have to worry. I cherish my life as well. Expeditions with no ample preparation rarely go well, and I also know about the high death rate among players who had just graduated from the academy.

“In addition, we have… you,” I explained.

“*Hahaha*. You’re just showering me with compliments. I’m not *that* amazing,” Raymond said.

“You’re amazing in my eyes,” I argued.

“*Haha*… well… if you say so… How will you form the party…” Raymond asked.

“I’m not sure…” I answered.

“Do you want me to see if there’s anyone I can recommend?” Raymond offered.

“No, you don’t need to do that,” I replied.

“…”

“I already checked the Adventurer Guild and…” I paused.

There was actually one person I had my eyes on.

Their job wasn’t a combat-type job. I was talking about that woman I coincidentally saw on my way back to Harizel. She had decent Magic stats

and special skills. She was also working as a bard.

I couldn't really understand it, but the fact that I couldn't caught my attention.

"Is there someone you have in mind?" Raymond asked.

"Yes, Grandpa. Do you remember the bard we saw on our way back to Harizel?" I asked.

"*Ahh…*"

"Yes, the woman who was playing the piano," I said.

"You mean at the three-way intersection outside the castle gate? I'm sure that woman—"

"Yes, she doesn't have a combat-type job," I interrupted him.

"Right. I think her name was…"

"…"

"No Dam-Hye," Raymond said.

CHAPTER 1122
A COMRADE WHOSE TRUSTWORTHINESS IS UNCERTAIN (7)

“I think her name was No Dam-Hye,” Raymond said.

“That’s right,” I said.

“I’m kind of surprised. I’m sure you have a plan, but recruiting a non-combatant into the party… She seemed like a good person… *hm*…” Raymond said.

“Don’t worry too much,” I told him.

“*Ahem*. I wasn’t worried… No matter what anyone says, I support your decision. More importantly… I hope you can do everything you want to do,” Raymond said.

“…”

“…”

“G-Gramps…” I stuttered.

I really liked absolute trust.

Actually, it was more like he was trying to address his past regrets. I already knew it, but Isabel Sunstrider couldn’t do everything she wanted. Since she had all the power, I was sure she managed the familia by listening to what her members had to say.

‘I’m sure he was one of those people. He’s old and has a lot of experience, after all.’

“But if you’re going to recruit a non-combatant, I think a blacksmith or leatherworker… *Ah!* An alchemist isn’t bad, either. Of course, doing what you want is the best, but…”

‘See! I can’t ignore him when he makes suggestions like that. You shouldn’t give those extra details, Gramps.’

“I wonder if that old timer is still active… How about getting into a contract with an experienced blacksmith—”

“It’s fine, Gramps. I’m going to recruit No Dam-Hye for a combat role… and we’re not going to create a familia… We’re simply creating a party… so signing a contract with non-combatants, including blacksmiths, should be fine. We don’t really have a lot of funds at the moment, so we don’t need to sign a contract right now,” I explained.

“Did that woman named No Dam-Hye tell you she had a combat role? *Ha!* Oh my… Ki-Young. As I said before, the Rohen Continent isn’t—”

“No, it’s nothing like that. It’s just…” I paused.

“…”

“I’m thinking about suggesting she change her job,” I continued.

“…”

He seemed kind of surprised, but he nodded in the end.

“It won’t be easy… What are you going to do if things don’t work out?” Raymond asked.

“I’m not sure. I need to try first before worrying about failing,” I answered.

Of course, it wasn’t going to be easy because one’s job here was the same as changing one’s GENIUS. It would cost a lot of coins to change one’s GENIUS.

For that reason, it was difficult to find a GENIUS who would give her an offer, and more importantly, it was highly likely that she was already in a contract. Even if I somehow managed to find her a different GENIUS, it was still questionable whether she was willing to betray her current GENIUS.

Non-combatants were often very loyal, after all.

Raymond Bolt cast a disappointed gaze at me, so I was sure he was aware of that fact, too. I was sure he was trying to find a reason to bring No Dam-Hye to our party, even if it meant taking a risk and suffering losses.

If I told him I had Mind's Eye, the issue would be resolved, but of course, I had no intention of telling him my secret.

"Anyway, I'm going to head out, Gramps," I said.

"Okay. You're not going to—"

"I'm not a kid, Gramps," I interrupted him.

"You brat."

Naturally, I ran out of the inn because I had a feeling that if I stayed any longer, we'd end up talking a lot longer. It seemed like an inn, but it was basically Woo Hyo-Yeol's party house. I hadn't signed any contract because I was afraid that he would feel burdened, but I was basically paying our rent.

"Which god do you serve?"

"I'm sorry," I said.

"If you're available, how about listening to the words of our GENIUS?"

'Why are there so many missionaries?'

"Have you heard of Rock God of the Moonlight?"

‘I don’t care about those insignificant gods.’

“We’re looking for a party.”

“Hey, handsome. Do you need bodyguards when you leave the city?” a woman asked.

“I’m just heading to the three-way intersection in front of the castle gate. I appreciate the offer, but no thanks,” I answered.

“It’ll be dangerous to go alone,” said the woman.

‘Dangerous, my ass.’

Adventurers moved in groups here, anyway.

‘There are tons of scammers here. I can see why Raymond was worried.’

There were portable camps everywhere in the three-way intersection. It was an intersection, so the players naturally gathered here to sleep or use it as a temporary base. It was far, but I could get there quickly using the public carriage, and it wasn’t *that* dangerous that I needed guards. I had never heard of monsters or bandits attacking that area, and it had also been stabilized a long time ago.

How else could a powerless bard stay there?

‘How can she even perform at a busy place like that?’

She’d find a hard time finding a spot to perform in such a busy place, and I was sure the missionaries would ruin her performance. No one at the bar would listen to a bard as well. They’d either be too drunk to listen or were busy talking to other people.

In that sense, the three-way intersection in front of the castle gate was one of the ideal gathering places, as it had more of a romantic vibe to it. At night, people would set up a campfire and talk about their adventures, bards would

sing songs, and players would throw coins at the bards.

They would share food, create parties on the spot, and go on an expedition nearby.

Of course… I didn't like that.

'Ugh, it's really dirty.'

The location reminded me of the leaking tent where Templar Gen and I once lived.

It was pretty big, but without any investment, it was obvious what was going to happen to this place. A place without an owner meant everyone here had no intentions of becoming a leader.

I heard people collect trash from Harizel every few days, but today wasn't one of those days. There was trash all over the place, and the stench of the people who hadn't washed themselves in days filled my nose.

The majority of them were too broke to afford a room in an inn.

'It's so unsanitary here.'

To make things worse, they were even sharing tents. There were no owners or rules. All they needed to do was ask whether there was room in the tent or not. If there were any rooms, they would just walk into it. Obviously, they didn't own anything valuable.

"Excuse me, is there any room?" I asked.

"Of course. Are you planning on staying the night here? *Hiccup*," they asked.

'The smell of sweat and alcohol.'

"Want a sip? *Burp,*" they offered.

Four hairy apes were gathered in broad daylight; they were drinking rum and playing cards. Their party definitely had no mage, as I could see monster blood all over them. It looked like they tried to wipe it off, but it would be hard to clean monster blood without a cleaning spell.

They were third-rate adventurers who relied on camps because they were too broke to purchase their own tents.

"My name is Robertson. Are you from the city?" Robertson asked.

"*Ah…* yes," I answered.

'Don't talk to me. I don't plan on getting close to you.'

They weren't competent adventurers. The security here was somehow being maintained thanks to the players, but people still committed crimes. They were just being cautious. If one committed a crime and ended up getting caught, these savages would immediately open a people's court.

If one got caught while stealing, one could kiss one's hand goodbye.

'Maybe I should've brought my own tent.'

I regretted the fact that I hadn't brought my own tent, but I didn't want to be treated like someone who couldn't enjoy this place. Indeed, the place gave off a romantic vibe, but the place was unsanitary.

Moreover, everyone here was like these two people before me.

If they weren't similar to each other, they wouldn't be able to stay here for long.

"Here, have some," Robertson offered.

'Your thumb is in my stew. Get your thumb out.'

Soon, sunset approached, and the people gathered around the campfire with

their piggy soup containing strange pieces of meat. A pot of stew was above the flames, and it seemed like the pot would never run out of stew.

Once it was empty, someone would come and add water and meat into the pot. Before the stew could run out once more, someone would add more water and meat into the pot.

Basically, I was sure that pot had never been cleaned.

"*Oh*, thank you," I said.

I had no choice but to act like I was enjoying it because that was considered romantic.

'Their idea of romance is wrong.'

I started hearing drunk people slurring their words, as well as adventurers talking about their adventures today. I got annoyed because I heard noises I didn't want to hear, but it was worth the wait.

Finally, the bard was here.

At least, there was one thing I was sure of.

'Bards like her are considered at a high level on the Rohen Continent.'

Since I was an alchemist, they couldn't be compared to me, but the non-combatants on the Rohen Continent were more advanced because they specialized in production work. It was natural since all sorts of insignificant gods could bless them or give them jobs.

This place was trashy, but it was pretty useful at the moment.

"Gods of war who take pity on the soldiers! Please be with us!"

"…"

“Give us the strength to have courage and overcome this hardship!”

I had no idea who wrote it, but the drunkards were singing it. They had their arms around each other and were spinning around the bard. Half of the rum in their cups ended up spilling because they raised their cups, but they seemed to be having fun.

Some people were busking with a single guitar. Many people sang songs that were popular back on Earth. People who missed being on Earth sat around them and nodded, while others requested songs while throwing some gold into the buskers’ hats.

It was like I was staring at a music festival; bards in their own spots played various songs to attract people.

No Dam-Hye was also in the corner playing an instrument that looked similar to a piano.

She had short hair, which reminded me of Ji-Hye noona, large eyes, and a naive-looking face. She was pretty good at the piano, so I was sure she studied the piano back on Earth. The sight of her made me wonder whether there was someone as talented as her in the Sacred Democratic Country.

The problem was that she wasn’t popular. There were only two to three people in front of her, but they weren’t even listening. They were actually talking to each other.

‘Who would be interested in listening to classical music?’

No Dam-Hye looked pretty cool with the way she played passionately and slammed on the keys as if she were imitating a maestro, but I wondered how many people were actually listening to her…

She had a noticeably small crowd compared to those drunken fools who were shouting and instigating the audience.

To make things worse, her music wasn’t from Earth. She was playing a piece

that only the nobles of the Rohen Continent would enjoy, but since it was being played at a vagrant camp, I was sure she wasn't getting much gold from these guys.

And that was when I appeared…

I hummed slowly along with the melody, and it sounded like I was humming a gospel. I unknowingly started humming and followed the melody as if I couldn't care less about what other people thought of it. Of course, I never thought I was a good singer, but there was a reason I was a transcendent being. The charming skill engraved in my soul was probably still there, so if I were to use a bit of that skill to charm these fools…

'Is easy.'

They'd think someone was singing a sweet song, and of course, the feedback was instant.

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ donated 50,000 coins.]

[The God of Sunet♥ donated 60,000 coins.]

[The Slender Tentacle Queen♥ donated 30,000 coins.]

[The Wine of Song and Revelry♥ donated 100,000 coins.]

[He Who Sits on the Golden Throne♥ donated 120,000 coins.]

CHAPTER 1123
A COMRADE WHOSE TRUSTWORTHINESS IS UNCERTAIN (8)

'It's embarrassing.'

I wasn't talented at singing or dancing. I never really enjoyed those activities. Of course, I learned more about them due to the performances I had seen so far, but watching and performing were two completely different things.

It would be great if I were singing a song praising Benigoa, but the fact that I was suddenly busking in the middle of so many people made my face turn red. I nodded cautiously and hummed to the music as if music was the only drug permitted on the continent.

Obviously, I had to ensure that I was doing this subconsciously. This was important.

The point of this was not to hum for other people. I had to hum for myself and not care about those around me. Normally, the noises would drown out my quiet voice, but my charming skill managed to imprint my humming on everyone within the camp located at the three-way intersection.

'I was worried I would fail.'

The camp gradually became quiet.

The beggars singing a warrior song while drinking rum, and the vagrants singing songs from Earth while reminiscing about their days back then went silent.

They focused on the humming that was coming from somewhere.

"…"

'I have to pretend like I'm not aware of what I'm doing.'

As I said, Flower Ki-Young had to be doing this subconsciously.

'That's the selling point.'

I'd look disgraceful if I were aware.

People started gathering around me; the other bards stopped performing and looked this way. I was sure my humming was akin to the singing of sirens. It wasn't as effective, but my voice sounded like it was enhanced by a strange spell or something.

The people around me were like sailors jumping into the sea.

"*Huh?*"

Flower Ki-Young looked around in confusion. It seemed that he had yet to discover this talent of his.

Just then, Flower Ki-Young's eyes glistened.

The sudden attention made me lower my head, but I lifted my head again and assessed the situation. A circle was created around No Dam-Hye's stage and me.

And that was when I heard voices everywhere…

"What the heck! Keep going, man!"

"*Ah… huh?*"

"Sing more!"

"W-What?"

‘Stop whining like that. You’re embarrassing me, damn it.’

“Sing a little more!”

“*Ah!*… I-I…” I stuttered.

“What are you doing? Keep singing!”

“I’m not a bard…” I mumbled.

I was just humming. Many people asked to shake my hand, and I felt a strange sense of madness from some of the female adventurers.

‘It’s not as effective as when I’m Charming Ki-Young, right?’

“…”

“…”

‘I’m doing okay controlling it, right?’

Obviously, No Dam-Hye was staring at me as well.

An opportunity to succeed had suddenly presented itself, and unlike her past performances where she had no audience at all, many people were watching her, so it was easy for me to deduce her feelings.

Regardless of her feelings, she was under the spell as well.

‘I’m sure she’s more resistant than these guys since she has talent in magic.’

In the end, she played her instrument again, and the performance began anew.

Regardless of whether I was still surprised or not, she played the song earlier. The crowd glared at me, telling me to continue.

‘Yeah, these fools are actually glaring at me.’

'Fine.'

It was embarrassing and awkward, but I decided to enjoy it a bit.

Flower Ki-Young's time was running out, so he probably wouldn't experience something like this again.

"…"

In the end, a clear and sweet voice reverberated, and someone pushed me from behind as if they were telling me to get closer to the stage.

I was unexpectedly pushed next to the piano. No Dam-Hye seemed to have realized my specialty, as she played a song that had a slow tempo and sounded like it would be played at a small church somewhere.

Up until now, I had been humming, but I finally added some lyrics to my song. All I needed to do was use the poems of the popular bards in the Democratic Country.

"A quiet light that softly illuminates the deepest darkness…"

"…"

"A light that illuminates the twilight darkness…"

"…"

"We'll talk passionately about your kind heart…"

"…"

"The future gifted by the Son of Light is what lifts the fallen sunset. The fallen Son of Light gives the future to the radiant sunset."

"…"

"He illuminates the places that the sun cannot reach."

Obviously, I had no idea whether things were going well or not.

I wasn't sure if my timing was right and if the lyrics were correct.

I was sure it sounded ridiculous to the point that it would make people laugh, but no one laughed. They savored the awkwardness. My charm skill was carrying me, but I was still creating a divine and warm atmosphere.

There were stars all over the sky, and the campfire illuminated the dark camp.

All I could hear was the crackling of the flames.

Everyone was somewhat drunk, and the atmosphere was making me drunk as well. I applied holy power to my voice without realizing it, and I sang while sprinkling little bits of light. It was important to sing in a relaxed tone.

I smiled in parts I made mistakes on, and then I would fill the place with my divine voice again.

[The God of Sunset♥ misses you.]

[The God of Sunset♥ donated 10,000 coins.]

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ mumbles that it's a great song. They say that it sounds sad for some reason, but they thank you for singing such a good song.]

[Lowest Abyss of the Abyss♥ is listening to your voice. They're singing along with you.]

'I'm getting donations as well.'

The broadcast itself was peak entertainment.

There wasn't any combat, but the core fans liked events like this.

Flower Ki-Young showed a little more courage. Although this situation was really embarrassing, awkward, and new, he was truly enjoying this event.

The melody gradually increased in tempo, and people started clapping to the beat.

Before the first song could finish, it naturally changed into an upbeat song, making it hard for me to keep up. Still, I clapped with them and sang awkwardly.

'I want to hide somewhere.'

Even the attention-seeker inside me was embarrassed, but he was hoping that Flower Ki-Young wouldn't end this fun time anytime soon.

"*Whoo!*"

Those focusing on us started cheering, and the other bards began playing their instruments.

'I'd expect nothing less from artists.'

Someone played their violin, some their guitar, and I even saw one person blowing an instrument that resembled a horn. No one called for them, but they joined because they got excited, and it was burdensome because all this started with my simple humming.

'Fine. Let's go crazy with the music.'

It was the only drug allowed in Rohen.

Obviously, I kept adding lyrics to it.

Although it was hard to do that because of the upbeat tempo, I was doing well…

"The wings with the stars departed, and the morning has come."

"…"

"Shaking off the swords of sin, the hero rises."

"…"

It kind of matched the atmosphere. It was a folk song that was obviously from another world, and it was an epic hero tale that traditional bards and the fools here would go crazy over.

"Rise up, friends of the hero! Shine your light!"

If I were to use the same lines, these fools would surely love it.

"Rise up, friends of the hero! Shine your light!"

"Rise up, friends of the hero! Shine your light!"

It kind of felt like I was back in Sacred Democratic Country because I was singing the songs that the bards there always sang.

'I don't think I've been gone for that long.'

I couldn't help but remember the faces of the people I had been missing.

[The God of Sunset♥ is…]

Kim Hyun-Sung was definitely reminiscing about the past, and it was proven by how he was talking nonstop.

It was time to stop crying and dance; the vagrants were cheering the bards while dancing. I stepped forward and grabbed a swordswoman wearing a blindfold, and brought her up on the stage.

I was kind of embarrassed, but I saw her smiling at my embarrassed face.

When I jumped around while holding her hand, I started sweating, and the others spun around while placing their arms on each other's shoulders.

I saw people grabbing a partner like I had done with the blind swordswoman.

“What’s your name, kid?” the blind swordswoman asked.

‘Ah, I wasn’t flirting.’

“Did you manage to get a tent?” she asked.

‘I wasn’t flirting.’

‘Let’s just dance.’

I grabbed her hand and started spinning. If I were to show her an innocent smile, she’d realize that I wasn’t trying to flirt with her earlier, right?

However, her hand started moving down. She wasn’t going to work, so I let go of her hand and immediately grabbed someone else’s hand before spinning around once again.

Soon, I stopped singing. It wasn’t like I was trying to debut as a bard. I was just trying to win No Dam-Hye over. Showing her that I was enjoying the music as her had to be enough, right?

While I was spacing out, someone came up and grabbed my hand.

‘Ah, stop grabbing my hand, damn it. Seriously.’

I still needed to play along, so I started spinning with them as well.

My body didn’t feel like my body, and I was gradually losing my mind because I was spinning nonstop.

‘Stop spinning.’

“Move it.”

“You move it!”

'Stop fighting. We can dance together. Shedding blood at a festival is unnecessary.'

I grabbed the blind swordswoman's hand again and started spinning with her.

The music was building up to a crescendo, and everyone was laughing amidst the revelry. I grabbed No Dam-Hye's hand, who was still playing the piano, and started spinning with her. Many bards were playing their instruments anyway.

"I-I…" No Dam-Hye stuttered.

'The music made us one, right?'

Just then, I felt someone pulling me away.

I continued spinning and dancing like I was having fun.

I was sure I'd meet No Dam-Hye again later.

'But why is this person grabbing my hand so tightly?'

And that was when I saw the face of the one who grabbed me from behind…

"*Uh…"* I said.

"…"

"…"

Jung Ha-Yan was looking at me quietly while gnashing her teeth.

CHAPTER 1124
A COMRADE WHOSE TRUSTWORTHINESS IS UNCERTAIN (9)

"…"

"…" Jung Ha-Yan was staring at me with gnashed teeth.

"…"

There was a huge change in her appearance, and it was the first thing that I noticed.

It wasn't her style.

I wasn't sure who dressed her, but she was wearing clothes with lots of annoying laces hanging on them, and her head was decorated with strange jewels.

Overall, she resembled a princess, so she looked cute, but her expression was anything but.

Anyone could tell that she wasn't trying to control her anger, and I saw a slightly creepy look on her face.

She was frowning, and her face was shaking because she was gnashing her teeth.

Obviously, this wasn't what Jung Ha-Yan looked like. I wasn't used to her behaving like this because she had been smiling a lot recently, but I understood why she was acting this way.

If I were in her shoes…

‘I would get angry… as well… ‘

I was sure she was upset because she was suddenly alone.

It was only natural for her to work hard to gather enough mana to cast a detection spell on the entire continent.

In stark contrast to her hard work, I was having a dance party with the female warriors here, so I would be mad if I were Jung Ha-Yan.

If Han Sora—a Jung Ha-Yan expert were here—alarm bells would start ringing inside her head at this sight. I was sure she would feel like an incident similar to the table-flipping incident and the meteor incident was about to happen.

There was also that incident when Jung Ha-Yan crushed guys whose names I had already forgotten; there was also that time when she summoned a demon as well.

‘…’

Jung Ha-Yan looked like she wasn’t going to hold it in.

The sudden festival was soon going to turn into the festival of blood. What was I supposed to do? Was I supposed to greet her like I normally would? Or was it better to hug her tightly and act like I had been missing her?

Would that help her forget this crazy dance party?

Normally, Jung Ha-Yan would never resent me.

She would resent the environment, the situation, or other people.

I could be misunderstanding it, but her gaze looked as if she was resenting me, which was unlike her, and it made me feel uncomfortable.

I was used to receiving hate, but I disliked hate when it was coming from my

family.

"*Eek…*"

To make things worse, she was glaring at the noona with the blindfold. Her invisible mana was about to overflow. I couldn't think straight due to the many different thoughts in my head, so I decided to just…

"…"

"…"

I couldn't pretend like I didn't know her.

I smiled brightly as if nothing was going on and started spinning with her. I needed to show her that the crazy dance party wasn't a dance of courtship by holding her hand and dancing with her.

I was simply enjoying the festival while smiling innocently.

And that was when Jung Ha-Yan's frown became strange…

She was angry, but she was happy to see me. She was confused as well. Despite gritting her teeth, her eyes looked like they were smiling, but the emotion that stood out the most was confusion. She was questioning why I couldn't recognize her.

"I-I… O-O-O…"

I immediately stepped away before she could say anything.

"*Huh? Uh… uh?*"

I heard her confused voice, but I disappeared into the crowd.

"Hey, regarding earlier…"

'Sorry, blindfolded noona, but not now.'

It wasn't the best option, but I moved to where all the big guys were and blended in with them. I pretended to be enjoying the festival, the music, and being a free spirit, but…

'Damn it, damn it, damn it.'

I felt uncomfortable, and the people around me made it worse. Instead of countless handshakes, many offered cheap rum, and the guys I would be sharing the tent with were there as well.

"Hey! You were really amazing. Did you learn how to sing?"

"What? No, I didn't learn… it's just… *Ah*, thank you for the compliment," I answered.

"I want to offer you a drink. Do you drink?" he asked.

"I-I'm not much of a drinker," I replied.

"It's a light alcoholic drink, so it should be okay," he said.

"…"

"Let's have a drink together," he suggested.

"*Ah…* sure," I answered.

"Cheers!"

'What are we cheering for?'

It was also work trying to drink a drink that looked like poison just to go along with the mood.

These scummy assholes…

I was sure they were trying to get me drunk so that they could steal from me, as I obviously looked like a rookie, even though I was trying to act like a

veteran.

My equipment wasn't cheap-looking as well, which made it worse.

Of course, they couldn't do that because Jung Ha-Yan was here.

Yeah, she was here.

'Ha-Yan is actually here.'

Although I was nervous, I was happy as well. Actually, I was happier than nervous. I saw as soon as I was starting to miss the others, so, of course, I was glad to see her.

If I could, I would hug her tight, but…

'It's not the time for that right now.'

I had many things to explain to her, but the good thing was that she wasn't following me. I was sure she was confused as well, and she was trying to figure out what happened earlier.

'I'll just sing for now.'

I started by humming as I did earlier, and my clear and sweet voice reverberated throughout the intersection.

The guys who offered me drinks, the drunk ones who were screaming, and the people who were enjoying the dance party while spinning around became quiet as they listened to my voice.

I sounded kind of drunk, and the tempo was still fast as well.

I maintained the same atmosphere as before and sang a song that suited the festival.

"Everyone will remember the white mage who was blessed with magic."

"…"

"I will be with the beautiful, noble, and pure child of magic forever."

"…"

"I will forever remember the scenery we saw together and everything we shared."

"…"

"I will remember the wings of blue magic and the smile of the white mage…"

"…"

The only difference from before was that I looked kind of sad right now. I was enjoying the festival; I was dancing and singing while smiling, but for some reason, I couldn't stop having sad thoughts.

The unknown longing caused tears to well up in my large eyes.

'Why… '

Despite enjoying the festival and the music, why was I still sad?

I had no idea, but for some reason, whenever I sang this song, I would always feel sad.

After finishing the song, I joined the people and tried to wash away this sadness with them.

"I'm feeling kind of… dizzy," I said.

"You must've had too much to drink. How about you turn in for the day?" they suggested.

"It's fine. I'm really… enjoying this place right now," I answered.

Spending time and laughing with people was helping me… forget the loneliness that was in the corner of my heart. This night was too long for me to overcome the sense of loss.

Since I arrived here, I had always been feeling a sense of loneliness and loss. Even though the people enjoying the festival were strangers to me, I was somehow overcoming my sadness with them.

'That part of my lore was added five minutes ago… '

"You can't even stand up straight," someone said.

"I'm fine, though…" I argued.

"Yeah, right…" they scoffed.

"Hey! Let's move him to the tent," someone suggested.

"Hey, Misters. Give him to me. I'll… support him," the woman with the blindfold chimed in.

'You stay out of this, noona. I'm doing this to save you, so please stay out of it.'

"No, I don't want to leave just yet. I want to have one more drink," I said.

"You sound like you went through a lot of things… Did something happen?" they asked.

"Did something happen… No, it's nothing like that. Even if something did happen… it's nothing serious. Everyone here is struggling…" I answered.

"*Tsk*. If you really want to have another drink, let's drink inside… It's starting to get cold…" they suggested.

'These fools… '

"I don't know what happened… but think of me as a life mentor…"

"…"

"It's fate that we met like this. It might not be that helpful, but I'm a really good listener," they said.

"Think you can walk?" another asked.

"I can—"

"You obviously can't walk on your own," someone interrupted me.

Despite looking like criminals, these fools were kinder than I thought.

They didn't have that greedy gaze, and it seemed like they were genuinely worried about me.

They looked like bandits, so I just judged them based on their looks. However, they were more like gentle, warm-hearted middle-aged men. It was funny that vagrants were comforting a player with a bright future, but perhaps they just didn't want me to end up like them.

"But are you a bard? Maybe changing jobs—"

"Bard, my ass. Can't you tell just by looking at him? He's a recently summoned player. His equipment is pretty clean…" one of them argued.

"Hey… you can hear me, right? Did… anyone come with you? You don't look like you came alone…" someone asked.

"There must be a reason why he came here. I don't think that's any of our business. Stop talking nonsense… and let's take care of him. We need to repay him for the outstanding performance he put on," another said.

'These bandits… are nicer than I thought… '

I felt like I had been too distrustful of people lately. Since I had met quite a few scums so far, I had forgotten that the world was a kind place. Of course, I

had no time to film a heartwarming drama with these middle-aged men.

One of the men was shaking, and his hands, which were supporting me, were getting sweaty. His face turned pale, and he seemed to be having a hard time breathing.

He was obviously sweating due to the energy Jung Ha-Yan was emitting, and this was the typical reaction that prey would exhibit upon encountering a predator that was on a completely different level from them.

Jung Ha-Yan came back to her senses and started looking for me again. She looked anxious, but it was clear that she had made up her mind. She was praying, hoping that she was wrong.

“O-O-Oppa?” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“…”

“O-O-Oppa… is that you?” Jung Ha-Yan asked.

“*Huh?”* I said.

“It’s… you, right?” Jung Ha-Yan asked again.

“Who… are… you? I asked.

“…”

“Do you know me?” I asked.

Ha-Yan’s face turned pale.

“Do you really… know me?” I asked.

CHAPTER 1125
A COMRADE WHOSE TRUSTWORTHINESS IS UNCERTAIN (10)

'What… was that?'

What on earth… were the memories that would occasionally pop into my head?

The memories felt like dreams. The fragmented memories were blurry and were like mists. The memories that suddenly popped into my head without warning would either make me smile or sad. My cherished comrades, no, family…

I remembered greeting them from the terrace as I looked down at the garden, and I remembered releasing a hearty laugh while having trivial conversations with them.

I could hear bards singing as the sun was setting, and I could also remember the silhouettes of those who were there.

I sometimes hummed the songs in my memories and sang lyrics that were unfamiliar to me.

It was strange. It was just a simple dream, but it was so vivid… I woke up from the dream, but the sense of loss was so great that it was unimaginable.

It was really painful, and it felt like I had forgotten something I wasn't supposed to forget.

The cute woman before me could be someone from my fragmented memories. I wasn't certain, but I had seen this woman's silhouette somewhere. At least, that was what I felt.

“I will forever remember the scenery we saw together and everything we shared.”

‘…’

“I will remember the wings of blue magic and the smile of the white mage…”

The song that those bards were singing popped up in my head.

“O-O… Oppa?” the woman said.

“Do you… really know me?” I asked.

The woman’s face turned pale, and I noticed her hands and feet trembling in disbelief. To make things worse, she staggered, and she looked so unstable to the point that I thought she was going to collapse.

‘M-Maybe she knows something.’

Perhaps this woman would help me piece together my fragmented memories. She could probably fill the void in my heart.

Naturally, I couldn’t help but start having expectations, as the woman was acting as if she was familiar with me. More importantly, I felt many emotions from her gaze—regret, fear, longing, pity, affection, and desire.

‘Desire?’

“I-I’m…” the woman paused.

“Yes?”

“W-We’re married. I-I was your wife.” The woman revealed.

‘Look at her.’

She was ruining my emotions.

“W-We’re married. M-My name is Jung Ha-Yan, and… we’re married. W-W-We’ve been married… for about a year… a-and we were on our honeymoon,” the woman added.

“…”

“Y-You only cared about me! Y-You always told me that you loved me… a-and we were always together… Y-You disappeared one day, s-so I was really worried. L-Look. M-My ring. It’s the ring you gave me!” the woman exclaimed while showing her ring to me.

“…”

“E-every day, you would tell me that you love me,” the woman added.

“B-But… I-I’m only… twenty-three years old,” I revealed.

“*Ah*… y-you’re twenty-three years old… W-Why… are you twenty-three years old? I… don’t know either… We got married a little early… b-because we had a child. H-His name is… L-Lee Sera…” the woman added.

“…”

“I-It’s true. W-We were summoned… to the continent together… and the tutorial… Y-You were older… in that place…” the woman mumbled.

She was overreacting. The emotions I had been setting up were thrown into the trash can because she was overreacting. I realized that this type of method was effective only on Hyun-Sung or Hye-Jin.

Jung Ha-Yan looked really upset, which was a stark contrast to her emotions earlier.

‘She looks pretty cute… ‘

Although she tended to jump in the wrong direction, she seemed to know exactly what she needed to do.

She confirmed just a moment ago that I had lost my memories, and I was sure that she had also confirmed the fact that the song of the bards back on our continent was still in my memories. She had to have realized the fact that the crazy dance party just now wasn't me trying to betray her.

I could feel her mana tickling me as it swept past me, and I was sure that she was checking to see…

'If there's anything wrong with my body.'

Just then, Jung Ha-Yan's face lightened up a bit. Of course, she was still worried about me, but she wasn't trying to find a solution right now. She seemed to be thinking that there was nothing wrong with my body, and she was probably assuming that I was just suffering from short-term memory loss due to the sudden summoning.

Even if that wasn't the case, she probably thought that she'd be able to find a way someday. After organizing the pieces of information that she had obtained so far, she started having a discussion with herself.

Soon, she reached a conclusion.

"H-How old are you…" I asked.

"N-Noona is… I-I mean… I'm twenty-one years old," Jung Ha-Yan answered.

'She just tried to change her age by making herself older.'

"…"

But who would believe her?

"I-I have proof as well. Y-You have a small mole… on your… inner thigh. It's something only I know…" the woman said.

"…"

“I-I know everything about you as well. Y-You told me… that you have a… y-younger sister and that… we resemble each other… You enjoy… drinking coffee… reading books… a-and having a tea party… There are more besides those. You have a habit of tapping your thigh… a-and I know your… shower routine…” the woman continued.

“…”

“W-When you wash up, you brush your teeth first… t-then wash your hair… t-then your face… and you wash from top to bottom…” the woman told me.

“…”

“Even for half-baths… y-you still do your routine. You’ve always had a well-regulated life…” the woman added.

‘It’s scary if you go into too much detail.’

“I don’t… understand… what you’re saying… I-I…” I stuttered.

“You have a scar… on your abdomen, right? T-There’s a small scar… which wasn’t there before,” the woman asked.

“…”

“If my assumption is correct, y-you don’t have any memories of it. I-It’s a wound engraved deep into your soul, s-so it won’t be erased,” the woman said.

“…”

“What… do you remember? Is there anything… you remember?” the woman asked.

“That’s… unbelievable,” I answered.

She was so aggressive that she reminded me of an eight-ton truck with a

broken brake.

It was like I was in a job interview.

I felt kind of scared because she was desperately telling me to trust her by using my secrets and habits as weapons. I knew I had to play along, but I wasn't sure how far I was supposed to take this.

I was sure Jung Ha-Yan knew that she had made a mistake.

For some reason, I became younger, and I was being wary of her for some reason.

'There's no build-up here.'

Normally, people would try to make someone understand by feeding information to them little by little, but she suddenly came up to me and told me that we were married. Who was going to believe that?

Even though we were doing a skit from out of nowhere, we needed synergy to create a decent work of art, but she just charged in, catching me off guard. Thus, it wasn't strange that the conversation seemed really eccentric.

Jung Ha-Yan asked, "Y-Y-You met… Sora… right?"

"…"

"D-Did Sora say anything? D-Did Sora… say you were… her boyfriend?" she questioned.

'I made it clear that she wasn't, damn it. Where did she even hear that rumor?'

"S-Sora noona is…" I paused.

"Did… Sora tell you to call her noona? D-Did she say she was older than you?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

“She didn’t. I-I was just kind of surprised back then… I didn’t understand the things she was telling me… she told me she’ll visit me soon… I-I know that I’m acting strange right now. It’s because of these strange memories… that keep on appearing in my dreams… She said she’ll look into this for me,” I answered.

“…”

“To be honest… i-it’s hard to believe. I’m… really confused right now… a-and I feel really out of it right now…” I confessed.

“B-But if… what you’re saying is true…” I paused.

“…”

“Then I must be really lucky,” I continued.

“…”

“I can’t believe… I married such a beautiful girl… *hehe*…” I added with a smile.

Jung Ha-Yan’s face immediately turned red. She lowered her head and started fidgeting with her fingers as if she had never acted like a wild horse charging at me. She attacked me first, but my counterattack had to have been too surprising because Jung Ha-Yan returned to her timid self.

“I-I’m… beautiful…?” Jung Ha-Yan asked.

“*Ah…* I’m sorry. I went too—”

“H-He called me beautiful. *He… hehehe. Hehehehe… hehehehehe.* I-I think oppa… fell in love with me at first sight, S-Sora,” Jung Ha-Yan said, giggling.

‘Sora isn’t here.’

“*Hehe… hehehehe. Hehehehehe. Hehehehehehe*.”

'Her giggling is kind of scary.'

However, I managed to take control of the situation.

The woman before me wasn't a crazy runaway train, but a shy girl. Rather than focusing on the conversation, she was trying to maintain her beauty, which I found to be pretty cute. She had to have realized that she was dressed like a princess because she was actually acting like a princess.

"I want to… believe you," I said.

"I-It's true. Really," Jung Ha-Yan said.

"Sure, but… I'm… confused right now… C-Could we take our time… and talk? I-I have many questions. The scenes… that keep… popping up in my head. I'm seeing people… whom I've never met before. There are also… memories from another world… and not the Rohen Continent…" I said.

"…"

"If what you're saying is true… could you tell me… why I'm here and why I'm having those dreams?" I asked.

"O-Of course!" Jung Ha-Yan answered.

'Ah, damn it… '

'I think I turned off my stream.'

I was sure I had it on when I was with Han Sora…

While I was smiling at Jung Ha-Yan, I decided to look up the logs.

After seeing the logs, I had no choice but to remain quiet.

[The God of Sunset♥ is asking if you remember him.]

[The God of Sunset♥ is shouting out, asking if you remember his name.]

[The God of Sunset♥ is sobbing and asking if you remember his face.]

'Ah… '

[The God of Sunset♥ says D%%118%^&!@DABBH^!]

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ advises you to watch out for the God of Sunset. There are GENIUSES who become obsessed with mortals. The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ warns that perhaps the irrelevant God of Sunset is one of those dangerous GENIUSES.]

[The Wolf Crying Under the Crescent Moon is ridiculing him, saying that he had already lost his mind.]

[The God of Sunset♥ is saying that this doesn't make sense. He's shouting that this shouldn't be happening. He's crying and saying this shouldn't be happening in real life.]

[The God of Sunset♥…]

[The God of Sunset♥…]

[…]

[…]

'…'

[The God of Sunset♥ is cursing everything on Rohen.]

'N-no.'

[The God of Sunset♥ says that he wants to destroy everything in Rohen.]

[The God of Sunset♥ has left the room.]

CHAPTER 1126
A COMRADE WHOSE TRUSTWORTHINESS IS UNCERTAIN (11)

[He Who Sits on the Golden Throne♥ laughs and says that the irrelevant god has finally given up.]

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ is still worried about you. Getting rid of a malicious GENIUS was worth celebrating, but he's worried about the God of Sunset's parting words because he might actually do it. He says the God of Sunset is out of his mind.]

[The Lowest Abyss of the Abyss♥ mumbles that the God of Sunset was the GENIUS who cherished you the most.]

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ is smiling. She's been keeping quiet because she feels like she's been talking ill about him, but she says the God of Sunset isn't the most ideal GENIUS for you. Like the Gatekeeper of Heaven said, his obsession was so extreme that it's causing him to be mentally confused.]

[The Slender Tentacle Queen♥ says that inexperienced GENIUSES go crazy sometimes. She believes that the God of Sunset will eventually break down because he can't endure his boring life, especially if he's a GENIUS with low self-esteem.]

'Why are they treating him like he's crazy?'

[The Mistress of the Holy Night♥ agrees with the Slender Tentacle Queen.]

[The Crooked Guardian says that they're on your side this time. They're laughing, saying it's annoying to see him acting like he's special to that

mortal.]

[The Wolf Crying Under the Crescent Moon also agrees with everyone and nods.]

'Why are they so negative about him? Why are both parties suddenly uniting because of Kim Hyun-Sung?'

[He Who Sits on the Golden Throne♥ says you don't need to worry about coins. He ridicules him, saying that he has probably used up all of his coins. He says you profited from this incident because you earned a lot of coins from him.]

[…is happy.]

[…is smiling happily, saying they're glad they don't have to see that annoying, irrelevant god again.]

As if Kim Hyun-Sung became the public enemy, I heard cries of joy everywhere.

'I know he can be extreme, but how could they hate him this much?'

Of course, I understood their feelings. Even the chairman wouldn't be exempted from criticism if they were to act overly friendly like a die-hard fan.

Although I hadn't been able to converse directly with Kim Hyun-Sung, I could obviously see that he had been consistently receiving stacks of the debuff called "hate."

Obviously, they thought of him as a crazy bastard because they were unaware of the secret history between the God of Sunset and Flower Ki-Young.

He had taken over the chatroom by telling the mortal what to do, and he made things awkward because he was unaware of the other's reactions. He

also often ruined the mood by throwing random donations. He constantly brought up pointless topics to have a casual chat with me, which was clearly crossing the line.

The Goddess of Flower and Fertility was my GENIUS, but I was everyone's Flower Ki-Young, so I understood why the chat was noisy.

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ says it's already in the past and suggests talking about your memories rather than stories about him.]

[The Lowest Abyss of the Abyss♥ agrees with the Gatekeeper of Heaven. They're wondering if you're really suffering from memory loss. They mumble, saying they want to know what happened to you and why you have so many secrets. They want to know your secrets.]

[The Mistress of the Holy Night♥ is excited by the new news. She says she can't stop watching because there's always a new secret.]

The bait I used today not only made the God of Sunset leave the chatroom but also made many people happy about the news. They were happy that I was suffering from memory loss.

This topic was just as popular as the God of Sunset leaving the room, and I could use this topic all day. Normally, I'd give them a hint or keep them guessing to get their reaction, but I couldn't do that right now.

[Soft Hands that Touch Leather♥ grabs their head, saying that they don't know what to do now.]

'Yeah, I don't know what to do either, damn it.'

Of course, it was because of Kim Hyun-Sung.

'Why did he even leave the chatroom… '

Dealing with Jung Ha-Yan in front of me was already hard enough.

'And what's this curse he mentioned?'

Could he really cast a curse? And what was he trying to say by expressing that he wanted to destroy Rohen? And why had he left the room?

'Damn it.'

I couldn't help but bite my lips because it was clearly my mistake. I was also aware that there was a limit to what Kim Hyun-Sung could do. He was an amateur when it came to what had been happening behind the scenes.

Even if he somehow managed to find a way to come here, executing it was a completely different story.

'He's not actually coming here, is he? He's not coming, right?'

I was worried. The possibility was low, but I felt anxious.

Whenever Kim Hyun-Sung and Jung Ha-Yan did something unpredictable, the plans that were going well would always end up falling into the abyss.

This time wouldn't be any different, as he was always creative and unpredictable when it came to messing things up for me. Kim Hyun-Sung pretended to care for me, but he was always looking for an opportunity to take revenge for what happened in his past life.

"O-Oppa… Oppa?" Jung Ha-Yan said.

'What do I do with her?'

"Regarding… your dreams… c-can I tell you about it now? I-I-In that case… it's pretty late… s-s-so how about we… go inside and talk? F-For now…" Jung Ha-Yan suggested.

I had to go to the temple first, not the tent, Ha-Yan. I had to talk to Chanelia Hermes' group first. Whatever happened in the future, there was only so much I could do, as I was just a mortal.

“Can I… call you Miss H-Ha-Yan?” I asked.

“Y-Yes, of course. P-Please just call me Ha-Yan. Y-You always…” she answered.

“I-I feel uncomfortable… calling you that right now,” I said.

“What?”

“Of course, I-I’m happy that I have a great bond with someone cute and beautiful… but regardless of that… I… need some time. I… still don’t remember anything… and if this continues, I’ll feel really bad…” I told her.

“…”

‘Please relax. I don’t want you to make things harder for me as well.’

“I’m a bit flustered… and nervous… I’m really sorry. I know I shouldn’t be like this… Are you disappointed?” I asked.

It was natural for me to be wary of Jung Ha-Yan.

I could feel a strange affection from the unfamiliar woman before me, but I couldn’t remember anything, so everything was scary and new.

Jung Ha-Yan was definitely aware of my cautious nature, so I believed that she wouldn’t get angry.

“I want to get to know you again,” I said.

“…”

‘Let’s make her blush as well. Make her feel like we’ll inevitably fall in love again.’

“…”

‘So please calm down.’

“Can I introduce myself again?” I asked.

‘Please.’

“My name is Lee Ki-Young, Miss Ha-Yan,” I said.

‘I’ll show her my brightest smile and extend my hand out shyly.’

‘Please.’

“…”

“…”

“M-My name is J-J-Jung Ha-Yan. *Hehe… hehehehe…”* Jung Ha-Yan introduced herself while giggling.

I was sure she liked it, but I had no idea which part of it she liked. Although I had lost my memories, we could get to know each other again and fall in love with each other again.

Was this the type of cliche she liked? Perhaps she wants to build our relationship from scratch.

Jung Ha-Yan wasn’t dumb.

She was definitely aware that I had been treating her like a younger sister before I lost my memories, and I was sure that fact was bothering her. Jung Ha-Yan was looking at me with her most determined look, so I was certain that she had made the decision to show a new side of herself this time.

After all, even if I ended up regaining my memories, the way she behaved at the time would always remain in my mind.

Like a femme fatale, she was determined to seduce me instead of fidgeting around as usual. Realizing that she was heading in that direction, I could tell that she was trying to become the ideal woman. She was meticulous when it

came to the details.

"*Hehehe… hehehehehehe.*" Jung Ha-Yan giggled.

'Try not to giggle so loudly.'

"Do whatever—*pfft*, you want, oppa. I'll always be in the same place," she said.

She was even using "the wise mother and good wife" concept where the wife would always wait for her husband.

'Just pick one… '

Her character was falling apart because she added too many elements to her character, but she probably concluded that showing her charms was the top priority.

"Then… shall we head inside, Miss Ha-Yan?" I asked.

"Y-Yes! W-We happened to have two tents, so you can use one of them," she said.

We?

"I don't want to trouble you…" I said.

"P-Please don't think you're troubling me," she stuttered.

I looked around and saw two women standing near her.

Nam Goong-Seon and Lim Chae-Ryeong? Their nature was good, and their unique habits weren't bad either. They had potential. Overall, I would give them a B, but they would probably have issues reaching Level 4.

'So they took care of her.'

I had no idea exactly when they had met, but I was sure they were the ones

who dressed Jung Ha-Yan like this.

“G-Give me something sexy,” Jung Ha-Yan requested.

“What? Miss Jung Ha-Yan—”

“Give me sexy clothes! Sexy clothes!” Jung Ha-Yan shouted.

Just as I expected, she ran toward the two who were watching cautiously from the sidelines and made a strange request. I had no idea why she requested a sexy outfit when we were going to stay in the tent, but she looked happy, so that was fine.

When I saw that she was busy thinking about which charming side of hers she was supposed to reveal next, I realized that it was highly unlikely for Rohen to fall at her hands.

‘Not only do I have to worry about Ha-Yan… but what do I do with No Dam-Hye?’

“I’ll… head in first,” I told her.

“W-Wait. Wait, oppa. I-I’m going to change… so let’s talk before you go to sleep…” Jung Ha-Yan suggested.

‘I can bring No Dam-Hye later. She’s not the issue right now.’

The problem was what Kim Hyun-Sung was going to do.

‘I wonder if he’s just going to come here.’

Was he going to come here despite the nerf?

‘No, that’s too big of a risk.’

I was sure he found this situation to be quite urgent. It was going to take quite a long time for him to create a body, and I believed that he wasn’t going

to come here due to the nerfs. He had no army nor support, so that would be the worst decision to make.

I also had no idea whether the system would let him enter or not.

The system probably thought that the Rohen Continent was already overloaded due to my presence here along with Jung Ha-Yan. There was no way the system would grant a visa to the God of Sunset when the continent was still unstable.

If Kim Hyun-Sung wanted to come here, his only choice was to come here as an illegal immigrant without a visa. Like…

'When the Outer Gods descended upon our continent.'

Or…

'A Demon Lord summoning… '

It was hard to imagine Kim Hyun-Sung being summoned as a grand monarch when he was really hostile toward demons and black mages, but what if he settled down here as the great monarch?

He'd probably receive the same title that the GENIUSES had been using for him.

"Monarch of Obsession and Madness."

'That doesn't sound cool. Obsession and madness… sounds kind of bad… He needs to have a new nickname. Something like Rage and Revenge… '

His title was going to be…

"Demon King of Sunset."

It sounded pretty cool, but…

I was sure his arrival would signal the destruction of the Rohen Continent.

CHAPTER 1127
A COMRADE WHOSE TRUSTWORTHINESS IS UNCERTAIN (12)

“Are you really okay? You really don’t need to be with me… since you have your own thing to do,” I said.

“Where would I go if not by your side?” Jung Ha-Yan asked.

“…”

“…”

“D-Do you still not believe me… despite coming all the way here? I-I was your wife!” Jung Ha-Yan shouted.

‘Would you believe what you said? I mean, I do *believe you, but I told you that I need time.’*

“No, it’s nothing like that… As I said yesterday… I still feel kind of awkward in situations like this. All I remember are fragments, and I’m not even sure about those… It’s not because I don’t believe you, Miss Ha-Yan. I just… feel kind of bad…” I told her.

“Y-You don’t need to feel bad. I-It’s my job. A-As your wife… I should be by your side as your wife!” Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

“…”

“…”

“In that case…” I paused.

"…"

"If you don't mind… can you keep this incident about my memory a secret? A-And our relationship as well… can you not tell anyone?" I requested.

Jung Ha-Yan quickly answered, afraid that I would reject her staying beside me.

"O-Of course. I was going to do that a-anyway… y-you didn't have to tell me."

'No, I think you were going to tell people.'

"…"

I was sure she would have gone around and spread the news to everyone.

Of course, it wasn't a big deal, but it would be too much… if people knew that I was married and had a child as a 23-year-old young man. I really didn't want Raymond Bolt and Woo Hyo-Yeol to feel uncomfortable because of it.

The naive Flower Ki-Young was completely different from the married Lee Ki-Young with a child to boot.

"I-I'll do well, oppa. I-I-I won't cause any trouble," Jung Ha-Yan reassured me.

'I hope so… '

'I'm not sure if you and Hyo-Yeol will get along.'

It was obviously useless to worry because they wouldn't really talk much, and they would just be acquaintances at most. The only time they'd probably work together was when they were on an expedition.

Since they would do their own business, it was highly likely this group would be pretty different from the Blue Guild, where the members were more like family. More importantly, it didn't really matter whether Jung Ha-Yan would fit in or not.

‘She’s already Level 4, after all.’

“Just you being beside me is enough. I don’t know why… but when I’m with you… I feel like I’m becoming more stable… Strange, right?” I asked.

“*He… hehehe…”* Jung Ha-Yan giggled. Her stats and the number “4” in her level weren’t enough to represent Jung Ha-Yan.

I was sure she had an overwhelming advantage compared to other Level 4—no, even Level 5 mages when it came to the number of spells, overall mana, magic proficiency, and mana recovery rate.

She was the most reliable ally that I could have right now, especially when just about anything could happen. What bothered me was that there were two women following her.

‘Are they going to come with her?’

“…”

‘They look like they want to go home.’

They said not even a word, and it was like following Jung Ha-Yan was only natural for them. I had no idea what kind of agreement they had with each other, but these two looked like maids looking after their princess.

Of course, they looked anxious, and I knew they were experienced players, but they weren’t strong enough to join Woo Hyo-Yeol’s party. Moreover, I didn’t want to increase the number of people in the party because he wouldn’t like that.

‘There are only two of them, though… so won’t it be fine? If things don’t work out after giving them a chance… I can give them administrative work… rather than labeling them as party members… ‘

‘No, Woo Hyo-Yeol is pretty sensitive. If his surroundings change too much, he might run away. I’m sure he’ll sniff like some wild dog and then growl after

picking up their scent.'

He was very cautious about getting close to people, but there were already three new party members in the party house.

Including the party member whom Woo Hyo-Yeol said that he would bring back with him, and assuming that No Dam-Hye would join us someday, there would be five people for a grand total of eight, including Grandpa Bolt, Woo Hyo-Yeol, and myself.

There were too many people to simply call it a party. This wasn't good news for me, as I wanted him to take their time getting to know everyone. At this rate, he would become an outcast and stand in the corner during an expedition or a meeting.

'Or he might feel too burdened to come out… '

I suddenly realized that Kim Hyun-Sung was a competent regressor, much more competent than Woo Hyo-Yeol.

"O-Oppa, h-how much do you remember?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"I'm not sure. I really… don't remember anything. My mind feels foggy… so it's hard to remember things. Strangely, I remember a faint singing voice and… another voice," I answered.

"D-Do you remember Hyun-Sung oppa?" she asked.

"*Huh?* Who… is that…" I asked.

'He's not a sociable person and doesn't have friends, but she has basic social skills.'

Actually, the words "basic social skills" were an understatement.

Kim Hyun-Sung was the Guild Master of the Blue Guild, and he was the key figure in the Human Alliance Forces. I was sure he would be helpful if he

received Jo Hye-Jin's help, but anyway, it was undeniable that he was in a pretty high position.

Naturally, I felt nervous the more I thought about it.

'How did he even become a GENIUS?'

And since when did he become aware that one could send quests and messages using holy power?

'Was it Ji-Hye noona? Is she helping him?'

'Wait, is it possible that he's not actually dumb? Maybe he never felt like he needed to use his brain until recently.'

Perhaps I was just being worried for no reason, but my steps were gradually getting faster.

"Miss Ha-Yan, I need to head to the temple," I told her.

"I-I'll go—"

"No. Please head to the inn I told you about. It's something I must do." I interrupted her.

"…"

"…"

"Please," I added.

"…"

"…"

"D-Don't take too long," she said.

'You think I'll spend a long time there?'

For now, I had no choice but to send Jung Ha-Yan and her maids to the party house.

After using a warp gate, I headed to Chanelia Hermes' temple.

My destination was a small city that had only a few warp gates.

'I've been pretty busy.'

I was supposed to visit the temple a long time ago, but I hadn't had the luxury of time, as I was too busy taking care of Woo Hyo-Yeol and creating a party with him.

Moreover, things were going smoothly, so I honestly had forgotten about it.

"Are you Mr. Lee Ki-Young?" a follower asked.

"…"

'Is this place a shrine or a leather workshop?'

"We've been waiting for you. The goddess…" they muttered.

"…"

'It's pretty big.'

Chanelia Hermes' followers greeted me, and she seemed to have predicted that I'd visit them, as the members of her familia walked up to me.

I stepped forward without hesitation, and they followed me quietly as if they were aides assisting the CEO of a large company. I saw an old craftsman constantly wiping his sweat with a handkerchief, and I was sure they had heard about me…

"We heard a lot about you. We prepared tea and snacks for you…" a follower said.

'You really think I'll be able to drink tea in my current situation?'

"Did the goddess…"

'Shut up.'

"Although it's nothing compared to the goddess, our collections…"

'I'm not here to shop. Wait, that one isn't so bad.'

"God of Sacrifice and Revival…" a follower muttered.

'It's been a while since I heard that name.'

Since they were aware of my true identity, I was sure they had heard some things about me from Chanelia Hermes. The follower standing next to me had to be the one Chanelia trusted the most.

"Wait… wait…"

It was like they were trying to buy time somehow. Their goal was pretty obvious. I was sure they thought they needed to calm me down a bit, or perhaps they weren't exactly prepared to welcome me.

When I reached a large door, they definitely thought that they couldn't stop me anymore because they lowered their head and kneeled. Obviously, before the door could even open, I could already feel fluctuations of holy power from inside the room.

I was sure the room was something similar to a sanctuary. It was probably a space that required permission from the old craftsman, and the room had to be usually sealed until they received word from *her*.

When the door opened, I saw a giant stone statue modeled after Chanelia Hermes and…

'Look at them.'

I saw some GENIUSES bowing toward me.

"…"

"…"

'I'm sure they're aware of their mistake.'

Chanelia Hermes and the other GENIUSES had descended here.

This was her own sanctuary, so she probably wasn't facing that many restrictions here.

However, the others had to spend a lot of coins to show up. They all looked different. There were probably less than a hundred of them, but witnessing all of them sprinkling light with their heads down was definitely a sight.

[God of Sacrifice and Revival…]

[God of Sacrifice and Revival…]

[God of Sacrifice and Revival…]

'They must've just now realized the seriousness of the situation.'

[We've been waiting for you, God of Sacrifice and Revival.]

"Why were all of you waiting for me instead of coming to visit me?" I asked.

[…]

[…]

[We had no way of contacting you, God of Sacrifice and Revival. We were going to explain our situation to you through Chanelia Hermes, but we were afraid… that the other GENIUSES would find out… I don't know what to say. Please don't be so angry.]

A guy who seemed to be the leader of the group spoke up. I wasn't curious about his nickname or name, but since he was the leader of the group, he shone the brightest.

He was a combatant as well. Although he seemed capable of leading a familia as big as the Flower and Fertility Familia, he had no way of doing that.

'Because he had invested a lot.'

I was sure this group had spearheaded the plan to turn Woo Hyo-Yeol into a regressor, and they had invested a lot of coins just to invite me here. Only those willing to risk their lives for the Rohen Continent were here.

[I can explain the details if you allow me, God of Sacrifice and Revival.]

"…"

However, it seemed that they thought I was a pushover, so I decided to grab a decoration hanging and threw it to the ground. I threw other stuff as well, and I acted like a lunatic.

A *thud* echoed throughout the quiet sanctuary. Obviously, it didn't matter whether the item broke or not because it was nothing more than a tool to show them my fury.

These guys looked at me with their heads bowed.

"…"

[…]

My voice echoed loudly throughout the quiet sanctuary.

"Hey, you jerks."

[…]

“Are you serious right now?”

CHAPTER 1128
A COMRADE WHOSE TRUSTWORTHINESS IS UNCERTAIN (13)

Some lifted their heads out of surprise. Their faces were filled with confusion, and they looked at each other to confirm if they had heard me right.

I had an idea as to what they thought about me. I was sure they were unaware of the details behind the continent's ongoing process of becoming fully independent, but they probably heard rumors about it, as they were the ones who picked me in the first place.

I was the God of Sacrifice and Revival. From the moment I became the Son of Light, I became the saint who had protected the continent by sacrificing everything, tolerating everything, and giving hope to all the people on the continent.

I cried for those neglected, and I was a kind-hearted individual who would never ignore those in a difficult situation.

I was a rare hero who saved the continent out of goodwill and love.

There was no other way to describe the God of Sacrifice and Revival.

In their eyes, I was sure it looked like I was holding a sign that said, "Will help for free."

'I'm sure they think I'm a pushover.'

Of course, they weren't using harsh words like that, and I was confident that they never even thought about it. They weren't third-rate thugs, after all.

I could use a company as an analogy. They hired cheap labor and assigned the project to me while providing the bare minimum of support. I understood how they felt because they had raised funds to establish the company and had spent a lot of money on this regressor project.

They had no other place to invest, and if this project ended up failing, it meant bankruptcy for the company.

They had neither the manpower nor the resources, but I was sure they had no choice but to continue this project. The answer to overcoming this was pretty obvious.

'They need to cut costs.'

That way, they could bring in a competent manager and get the most out of them while paying the bare minimum. If the coins delivered through Chanelia Hermes was how they covered their costs, then there couldn't be a business more profitable than this business.

Since they also had to consider the breakeven point, I understood why they couldn't give me a lot of support.

While they were having a hard time finding a suitable person for this position, a certain someone appeared. He was a competent, warm, and sacrifice addicted saint with no greed whatsoever within him.

I knew they were acting this way because I suddenly threw items to the ground and uttered such harsh words.

[G-God of Sacrifice and Revival. Please calm down and hear us out…]

"What more is there to hear? You incompetent fools," I insulted them.

[So—]

"It's pretty funny. You fools thought I was a pushover who would do anything you asked," I interrupted them.

[Are you truly the God of Sacrifice and Revival?]

“Then who do you think I am? *Ptui*. You guys are the ones who brought me here, damn it,” I answered.

[…]

[…]

“Hey, you incompetent fools,” I said.

[…]

“Do I look like a pushover to you?” I asked.

[…]

“Does the God of Sacrifice and Revival look like a pushover? Did you think that if you came this late… I would shed a tear and do a high-five with you guys?” I questioned.

[…]

“I’ve become really nice, damn it. I was going to be as understanding as possible, you fools,” I added.

[…]

“Regression is something I experienced as well, so I know how much you sacrificed and how tight the budget is. There’s a lot of work to do but not enough manpower. You have things you need to do for the mainstream, and you also need to update the continent, but you don’t have enough coins to do so.

“You need to create dungeons and spread them throughout the continent, and you also need to help the players power up, but the idiots are busy satisfying their own selfish desires,” I continued.

[G-God of Sacrifice and Revival, I think your inner demons…]

'Inner demons? Have you been reading martial arts novels or something?'

"Since you need the cooperation of the other factions, you need a way to bribe them, and to improve the stabilized Rohen Continent, you need enough coins.

"I'm sure you probably don't have time to take care of your own familia at this point, so I understand your situation.

"I don't really pay attention to other people's situations, but I'm still very understanding," I explained.

[God of Sacrifice and Revival, can I take a quick look?]

'Why does that grandma keep on saying that?'

"I'm feeling annoyed to see you guys here because it makes me think that you only came here because the situation has become really urgent. You shouldn't have come here. Don't you agree? You only gathered and descended to this sanctuary because it's not that expensive, am I right?" I asked.

[*Haha*… what to do… God of Sacrifice and Revival, I think your inner demons are taking over… Amitabha…]

"Just shut up! Someone shut him up. I really can't focus," I shouted.

The old woman flinched, but the guy next to him quickly grabbed the old woman.

'At least he's quick-witted.'

I was sure he had an idea as to what was going on right now. The ones worried that an inner demon was really taking over me were starting to get worried for a different reason.

“Bring me a chair,” I ordered.

[…]

Chanelia Hermes got up and grabbed a chair.

I immediately sat on it.

[Did you trick us?]

“Are you kidding me? You should first think about who tricked who before asking that question,” I argued.

[…]

“…”

[I have nothing to say, God of Sacrifice and Revival. I know you don’t want to hear it, but please give me a chance to explain myself.]

“…”

[The incident that occurred while summoning you to this continent wasn’t something we intended. It was our fault for not anticipating the system’s interference, and we had no way of fixing the incident that had already happened. We’re aware of our mistakes and are reflecting on them by thinking of a way to compensate you for this mistake.]

“Compensat, my ass. Don’t you dare think that’s enough to make me feel better. You keep talking about the system’s interference, but have you guys not realized that the incident wouldn’t have happened had you guys used the correct spell?

“The system has interfered because the visa application was poorly written. Isn’t it your job to write a well-written visa so that I’ll arrive here safe and sound? Don’t you feel guilty putting the blame on the system?” I complained.

[…]

[…]

[Secondly, the reason we weren't able to give you the support you wanted…]

"Because there were strong differences in opinion between the factions, and you were worried about their reactions, right? The coins that can be used to compensate me are being used elsewhere, right?

"Hey, if you were going to support me with everything you had, you should've supported me properly. Does it make sense that the top donor of my streams is the Goddess of Flower and Fertility? Do you have anything to say about that?" I questioned.

[…]

"*Ah,* you didn't give me a lot of support because you were afraid of getting caught, right? Right? So that's why Chanelia Hermes is the only one taking responsibility," I said.

[W-We invested a lot in this plan, God of Sacrifice and Revival. I know you're disappointed in us, and we're really sorry and regretful of the damage and pain you received because of our incompetence, but… if you truly—]

"Yeah, whatever," I interrupted her.

[If you truly…]

"Forget it," I said.

[How rude!]

A burly general shouted at me.

"?"

[You're nothing but an insignificant god from a remote dimension, but you actually dare to be so rude to Lady Jupiter for the sake of keeping yourself safe?! You rude scum…]

"…"

[If you think with that little brain of yours!]

"If you don't shut that big guy up, I'll show you what it means to be rude," I threatened.

[How dare you! Lady Jupiter, I didn't like him from the start! Why should you bow to an insignificant god from a dimension we can't even see?! I know it's for the Rohen Continent, but still…]

"I won't repeat myself," I said.

[You really have lost your sense of fear! I'll just…]

"What are you going to do about it?" I asked.

[…]

"You want a dimensional war?" I asked.

[You're finally showing your true colors. Fine! If that's what you want, Rohen will not back down.]

"You're the one who wanted this. Don't go back on your words," I said.

'Hyun-Sung is coming here anyway.'

'Yeah, I'll just wipe everything out and start new. Only by experiencing the wrath of Kim Hyun-Sung, the God of Calamity, will they come to their senses.

Had they seen how Hyun-Sung defeated the Outer Gods, they wouldn't dare to yap like this before me.

[I-I'm sorry! God of Sacrifice and Revival. It's my mistake. Please forgive…]

Unlike the guy who had muscles for brains, Jupiter seemed aware of what was going to happen in the future.

'A dimensional war?'

What could they do when they were stuck in their rooms all day just watching the players? Of course, I was also a bit scared because I couldn't ignore the difference in our size.

'But still, God of Calamity Kim Hyun-Sung can definitely handle all this. I also have Belial… and Rimoura of the 27th Legion.'

I was scared, but I was sure they were more scared than me.

There were no signs of anyone possessing significant power among the players, and they had just transformed Woo Hyo-Yeol into a regressor, so they were broke. If they were to attempt to gather money for war, it would be tantamount to suicide.

I was sure if one were to strip everything away on them, there wouldn't be much left.

Even when the demon lords had appeared, they still had no plans of joining forces, so they definitely wouldn't join forces just because a dimensional war was taking place.

I was sure the GENIUSES would use that opportunity to side with me. One thing I had to consider was the higher-ups' interference, but the chance of that happening was low.

'They didn't do anything even when the three demon lords caused trouble here. I'm sure they won't do anything even if a dimensional war ends up happening.'

[Lady Jupiter! Why are you bowing to this insignificant god? I will lead the troops and make Rohen's name known—]

[Quiet! Mars!]

[But…]

[I said to be quiet!]

[…]

[I'm sorry, God of Sacrifice and Revival. That was extremely rude. H-How can I ask for your forgiveness? Whatever it is… you want… we'll—]

"Forty percent." I interrupted her.

[…]

[…]

"I'm being really generous. Think of it as me being considerate of your situation," I requested.

"If I manage to stabilize this continent, I would like to take forty percent of the holy power that this continent can offer. You don't have to worry. I will help manage this place, and unless something else comes up, I plan on investing that forty percent

"You won't run into any issues managing this continent… and you'll actually thank me for it. It'll be better than leaving it to the fools who are wasting their time here," I explained.

[T-That's nonsense… Lady Jupiter!]

[I accept.]

[L-Lady Jupiter.]

"There's one more thing," I said.

[…]

“I think a spy for one of the demon lords is hiding here,” I said.

[…]

[…]

“I’d appreciate it if you could get rid of that bastard as well,” I added while staring at the burly general.

CHAPTER 1129
A COMRADE WHOSE TRUSTWORTHINESS IS UNCERTAIN (14)

I was sure none of them thought that Mars had made those remarks because he was a spy of the demon lords.

[*Haha…* I think there's a misunderstanding, God of Sacrifice and Revival. Mars is a spy of the demon lords? He has made the most sacrifice for Rohen among all of us.]

'She hasn't realized it yet and is talking nonsense again. '

[God of Sacrifice and Revival, is there really an inner demon…]

I was tired of answering them.

Except for the confused old woman, everyone knew what I was talking about.

Jupiter appeared quietly in front of the insignificant gods, who were quickly trying to stop the demented old woman. She had long, curly white hair, and it was obvious that she was the leader of the group. Moreover, the others were waiting for her decision.

There was a moment of silence, but the silence wouldn't last long, as she knew that they didn't have a lot of time.

'Yeah, you're right, damn it. I'm testing you right now.'

'Let's see if you're really going to join me or if those were just empty words. That jerk is getting upset again.'

[You rude bastard! How dare you say that I'm a spy of the demon lords!]

Mars shouted again, and a javelin fell from the sky like a bolt of lightning.

There was a thunderous boom, and I saw Jupiter wielding a javelin.

[Lady Jupiter!]

She probably couldn't keep watching the insignificant god acting out of place.

Mars' eyes sparkled at the sight, but he stopped smiling not long afterward.

Jupiter's javelin pierced Mars' throat as if it were a lightning bolt. It was a swift attack without any hesitation at all. I wasn't the type to be easily impressed, all thanks to Kim Hyun-Sung, but even I was impressed by her simple and swift attack.

'You're… stronger than I thought.'

[*Cough… cough…]*

Mars stretched out his hand while holding his throat, and he looked as if he had been wronged, but…

'He's acting like a really big baby. It's not like he's actually dying.'

He was just going to be recalled, but I was sure he would still suffer some damage. Considering the fact that they needed to use coins to help him recover physically, it was true that they'd be affected, but the sight before me wasn't what I wanted.

[I'm sorry, God of Sacrifice and Revival.]

"…"

[I'll make sure Mars will receive his punishment. I ask that you forgive his rudeness with this.]

Jupiter lowered her head even more, and I could tell that she didn't want to lose the remaining combatants here. Her actions just now made me realize that there was a reason she was the leader of the group.

'She's demonstrating her powers, right?'

She was probably trying to show me that they weren't powerless.

It was no different from her telling her members that they'd need to be prepared to sacrifice themselves if a dimensional war ended up happening. This was probably the least she was willing to offer, as Mars probably played an important role in the group.

"Fifty percent."

[I gladly accept.]

"We should probably write out a contract," I suggested.

[Of course, God of Sacrifice and Revival.]

Jupiter…

'She doesn't seem so bad… '

Obviously, it was too early to change my opinion about her because of her actions earlier, but if one of my opinions about her had changed, then wouldn't everything about her change?

I thought she was just a non-combatant, but she was pretty good with a javelin. She was being humble despite that, and I found it impressive. She wasn't just being respectful. She bowed her head as if she was truly repenting.

All of this could just be for show, but not a lot of people could do that, so I would say…

‘I guess she’s not stupid.’

She seemed pretty satisfied as well.

‘Is it a good thing that she’s not a pushover?’

She was definitely happy about being on the same side as a competent figure because the contract talks went pretty smoothly. Perhaps

‘She just wants to turn Rohen upside down.’

The Rohen Continent’s management system was made with idealistic ideas in mind, but the results weren’t exactly ideal.

I was sure they expected the GENIUSES to support the mortals and turn them into heroes, but this continent had long become a playground for these idiots. Most of them were just having fun, forgetting that they were admins of the continent, and the coins that were supposed to be used to improve the continent were being used on other things.

No one in their right mind would just sit around and watch this happen.

Anyway, she knew the Rohen Continent needed some changes, and being on the same side as the God of Sacrifice and Revival wasn’t bad for her. Losing fifty percent was probably painful, but I was sure this group wasn’t spending much in managing the continent, anyway. I guarantee that they weren’t spending even ten percent.

‘From her point of view, a dimensional war might actually be a good thing.’

Use the war to wipe everything out and then start from the beginning…

[If there’s anything else you would like to add, feel free to let me know.]

“I’d appreciate it if you could provide me with some assistance,” I said.

[Can you explain exactly what kind of assistance you’re looking for? We’ll

support you with as many coins as possible, but…]

"…"

[…]

"I'm aware that you can provide assistance in other ways. You're probably wondering what I want, but I'd like to hear first what you can do for me," I said.

[We can provide you information about Level 4 or higher dungeons that are under our control as well as some items as long as the system allows it. If there's a class you want, we can ask a GENIUS in our group to make it as close as possible…]

"Not bad. Also…" I paused.

[We'll do our best to support you with… restricted items. I'm sure you're already aware, but…]

The situation was more serious than I thought.

"Was your will the only thing you inherited?" I asked.

She nodded. Just like Benigoa, it seemed like the only thing they inherited from their first life was their will. I felt like they had inherited a lot more than Benigoa had, but I was sure that wasn't something they were happy about.

At some point, when they opened their eyes, they were enveloped by an enormous light, and I was sure that it was completely different from when Benigoa and a small group of admins were given admin rights.

[I know it's late, but I promise to give you our full support.]

"How are you going to give me your full support? You have nothing…" I said.

[That's…]

"As someone with more life experience, let me give you a piece of advice. I'm saying this because I consider all of you my younger siblings, so don't be upset," I said.

[…]

"You need to know how to cut off the rotten parts. Do you understand what I'm saying?" I asked.

[That's…]

"There are too many incompetent people here, so you need to cut off those people. How many were willing to stop the demon lords when they arrived here?

"I get it. It may seem like you still have a lot of time, and you're comforting yourselves by saying that the Rohen Continent won't get destroyed, but if you can't manage them, it's better to cut them off," I explained.

[I understand what you're saying, but armed conflicts between groups… are prohibited.]

"No one is asking you to fight. That's probably the best option, but there are other options, right?" I asked.

[Are you saying… we should lead the humans into conflict?]

"I never said that… Do you think that's the answer?" I asked.

[…]

"That sounds like the answer, right? Killing a GENIUS doesn't always involve conflicts between groups. If you look at the bigger picture, what you said is close to the answer," I said.

She was looking at me as if she were looking at a demon.

“And who prohibited having conflicts between GENIUSES? Didn’t you pierce the throat of that burly fellow? I didn’t see the system prohibiting it…” I pointed out.

[…]

“And there are ways to resolve this without using force… Looks like our conversation is going to drag on, so let’s continue this the next time we meet. I think our contract is good enough… Aren’t you going to sign it?” I asked.

[…]

“You don’t want to get into a contract?” I questioned.

She looked as if she were getting into a contract with a demon. Her eyes were shaking as she stared at the contract we wrote while talking to each other. She was trying to determine whether she was making the right choice.

Unfortunately, she had no choice but to sign the contract, as there was a clause attached that said they’d do their best to prevent any accidents that could occur because of the God of Sunset.

That was the only reason they gathered here. War was war, but they had no idea how to stop the Demon King of Sunset, who was going to cause chaos on the Rohen Continent.

“You can’t expect me to take care of everything. You guys need to work as well. Anyway, thanks for coming all the way here and send my regards to that burly fellow…” I said.

[Yes, sir.]

“So… good job, Lady Jupiter,” I added.

[You as well, God of Sacrifice and Revival.]

"*Ah!* Send the dungeon information right away. I'll probably go to a dungeon either today or tomorrow," I ordered.

[Sure.]

'My schedule was moved up a bit, but… '

I had no choice because I didn't know when Kim Hyun-Sung was going to charge in here. If he came here with an Outer God visa, it'd take him years to get here, but if he came here with a great demon lord visa, it'd take him a few months.

Even if he used the fastest method to get here, it'd still take him at least a few weeks.

'We have a lot of time.'

Even if he ended up arriving with a great demon lord visa, the summoned demon lord could leave the summon area until a certain amount of time had passed.

Naturally, the Demon King of Sunset would be isolated, so we had enough time to grow stronger before confronting him. Still, it was true that we didn't have a lot of time.

I had just left the temple when I heard a loud voice.

[A new mainstream has been unlocked.]

At the same time, I saw some images in my head. A grotesque-looking demon was hunched over, gasping for air.

It looked far from an ordinary demon, and I wouldn't be surprised if the demon were dying.

However, what caught my attention was a figure covered in blood.

The figure was stomping on the demon as it gasped for air. The demon's wounds were so deep that I could tell that there had been a bloody battle between the demon and the mysterious figure.

The winner was obvious. After all, one was on the ground while the other was standing.

Moments later, the figure punched the demon's face. There was a *wham* and a *crack as* fragments of the demon flew everywhere. However, it seemed that they were still angry, as they pummeled the demon again.

Eventually, the grotesque demon stopped moving, and I heard a familiar voice again.

[Marthym, the commander of the 21st Legion, has been annihilated. The Demon King of Sunset, the new commander of the 21st Legion, will descend to the Rohen Continent.]

[The Demon King of Sunset's Castle, a dungeon with an immeasurable level, has been unlocked.]

[The entire eastern region will soon be dyed with a grayish sunset.]

"…"

"Don't…" I mumbled.

"…"

"Don't start…" I said.

[The mainstream event, Demon King of Sunset, has started.]

CHAPTER 1130
A COMRADE WHOSE TRUSTWORTHINESS IS UNCERTAIN (15)

[The mainstream event, Demon King of Sunset, has started.]

'…'

"T-That crazy bastard…" I mumbled.

Naturally, I looked at the eastern region and saw a grayish tsunami. It was like the world was telling me that the message I heard just now wasn't a mere lie. The grayish tsunami engulfed the blue sky, and it seemed as if it were about to swallow the entirety of Rohen.

The sight was so surreal that it could easily be called the signal of the apocalypse.

'Crazy asshole.'

I thought it would take him at least a few weeks to arrive here, and all my assumptions about what kind of visa he would use to pass through Rohen's immigration all went down the drain.

Who would have guessed that he had no intentions of getting a visa in the first place?

Kim Hyun-Sung was crazy, but I had never imagined that he would steal the visa of one of the demon lords. I hadn't expected that he would put his life on the line, and if he was just a little unlucky…

'He could have died… '

I knew Kim Hyun-Sung was strong, but his opponents were demons.

It wasn't like he fought thirty or fifty demons, but he found twenty demons.

Moreover, the Commander of the 21st Legion had to have been an incredibly difficult opponent. After all, he was the commander. The wounds I saw on Kim Hyun-Sung told me just how tough the battle was.

It was highly likely that Durandal, his favorite weapon, was either destroyed or lost because I couldn't see a sword in the video that played in my head.

My head was hurting, but what annoyed me the most was that someone was probably helping him. They had to be someone who could help Kim Hyun-Sung confront the commander of the 21st Legion.

'Ji-Hye noona? Rimoura?'

'Maybe Belial? If it's not him, then it might be that crazy crow.'

There were many possibilities, but I knew Kim Hyun-Sung couldn't have done all this by himself.

"*Ah*, this is bad. *Ah… ah…* this is bad," I said.

If the incident had occurred before I signed the contract, I could have used Kim Hyun-Sung's arrival as a signal to invade Rohen. It felt like the price immediately plummeted to the ground as soon as I bought what I thought were decent stocks.

Obviously, I wasn't the only one who was confused.

"What the heck…"

"What the hell is a Demon King of Sunset?"

"It's a mainstream event. It's up! It's up!"

“21st Legion? Grayish sunset? What the hell is going on all of a sudden…”

“Contact the familia right away. See if they have any new information or how to deal with this.”

“I’m connected. We were told to return immediately.”

“Damn it… What about the guys who already went on an expedition…”

“They said there are no exceptions. Everyone must return.”

“The Adventurer Guild still hasn’t said anything? None of the players have received any information from their GENIUS? Is this really happening? Does no one really know about this?”

“What about a prophecy? I thought we hadn’t received any prophecies recently.”

“T-They said to return for now. Other than that… I don’t know anything or what’s going on right now…”

“Damn it! If this is how they handle it… We prepared so much for this expedition…”

“Breaking news! Breaking news!”

“…”

“Breaking news! The King of the Underground Familia is urgently recruiting mercenaries! Only those Level 4 or higher can apply, and they’re looking for permanent members! They’re going to provide the best benefits the industry can offer, so everyone should apply! You can apply through the Adventurer Guild!”

“The Guardian of Fate and Time Familia are also recruiting mercenaries! We’re also looking for production workers who have already signed a contract!”

“Looks like things are going to start getting busy…”

“It’s been a while since a mainstream popped up… How many years has it been?”

‘It’s such a mess.’

“*Pew, pew pew!* I would like to thank the GENIUSES for subscribing. I’m Choi Byeon-Shin of Byeon-Shin TV. As all of you already know, today, I mean just now, the mainstream event, Demon King of Sunset, has started.

“It suddenly appeared without any warning, so I’m sure many of you are confused. I’ll tell you guys if they actually hid any information related to it,” Choi Byeon-Shin said.

‘There’s all sorts of people here.’

“So the bottom line is—we don’t know yet. I don’t know who the Demon King of Sunset is or what they mean by Marthym of the 21st Legion getting annihilated, but one thing I’m sure of is—GENIUSES!

“Please don’t leave! I have information that’ll shock you! GENIUSES!” he shouted.

The city was turning into a marketplace.

People were terrified by the strange phenomenon, but most of the players seemed to welcome the mainstream event that occurred for the first time in a long time.

I saw players quickly contacting the central region, while others quickly returned to their familia after receiving a call. There were even people selling coins to the insignificant gods. Even the GENIUSES were so confused that they were watching a stream that provided zero information.

“Give me everything you have. All of it. They’re all potions, right? How much is it?”

“The price went up a bit.”

“It’s fine, so just give it to me!”

I even saw people buying things in bulk out of panic.

It was like they were purchasing personal supplies and items, like potions, rather than food for the war. They seemed determined to contribute to the mainstream event. Even if they ended up not using those items, the major familias would surely collect them, so it was better to buy for the long run.

I understood their greed because the higher the difficulty, the better the rewards…

‘They think they can clear the dungeon.’

The low-level players also seemed busy.

I felt like they were trying to contribute by hunting near the dungeon instead of entering it, bu was that even possible?

‘Don’t go there, no matter what.’

For now, the dungeon was impossible to clear. Of course, this was our best chance to make any clear attempts, as part of his stats were definitely nerfed. He came here with the 21st Legion visa, after all. The range where he could move was limited as well.

With those factors in mind, it seemed doable, but we lacked information.

Their basic stats weren’t enough, either. I was not sure how much power the major familias of Rohen had in their hands, but it was probably similar to us when the 27th Legion incident occurred on our continent.

It was before Hee-Ra noona’s awakening, before Jung Ha-Yan learned Teleport, and before Kim Hyun-Sung learned his ultimate move.

For now, entering the Demon King of Sunset's Castle was suicide.

William was useful, but he was still inexperienced.

I had no idea where all the other named players were, and Woo Hyo-Yeol had just arrived here as well. Basically, it was like the 27th Legion summoning incident had occurred as soon as Kim Hyun-Sung arrived here.

This situation was close to being the worst-case scenario.

We needed to figure out what we were going to do moving forward.

'I-I'll head to Harizel for now.'

No matter what was happening, I needed to talk to the party members first.

I immediately approached a warp gate, but returning to Harizel wasn't easy. The sudden mainstream event caused a long line to form. After waiting a few more meaningless hours, I finally entered the gate heading to Harizel.

"How much longer do we have to wait? Hurry up and open the gate, damn it!"

"Open the gate already! Damn!"

'This place is a mess as well.'

"Move it!"

"Still no calls yet? What are the major familias doing?"

'…'

"They ordered to collect as many supplies as possible in Harizel."

"What?"

'Looks like they're trying to buy everything out here as well. Assholes.'

Regardless of whether or not the major familias were going to create a squad to enter the Demon King of Sunset's Castle, I needed to get as many food and consumable items as I could.

"The general shops, marketplace, and even street vendors ran out of everything, sir."

'Ah man… '

"Damn it… what did the higher ups say? Are you sure you bought items from the low-level players as well?"

"We've been talking to them… but they seem like they don't want to sell their items."

'Would you guys sell?'

I'm sure most of them were buying items because they were panicking. Unless the merchants were idiots, they wouldn't sell their items so easily; they'd raise the price as much as possible before selling the items.

Except for the major familias with a strong foundation, I was sure the small and mid-sized familias were experiencing financial difficulties.

"O-O-Oppa!" Jung Ha-Yan shouted.

"Miss Ha-Yan…" I greeted.

I pushed through the crowd and returned to the party house.

Jung Ha-Yan immediately greeted me. I was kind of surprised because she suddenly hugged me, but after seeing the supplies on one side of the room, I smiled. I was so happy to see Raymond Bolt checking the supplies.

'I knew I could trust you.'

He hadn't wasted his years. After feeling relieved, I looked around the party

house. As I said earlier, Raymond Bolt was checking the supplies while Jung Ha-Yan's two guardians, Nam Goong-Seon and Lim Chae-Ryeon, were being cautious.

They seemed confused about why they were here, but they nodded at me.

"Grandpa," I said.

"You're back. I thought you were going to bring that bard with you? Instead, you brought some strange people with you," Raymond said.

"Yes, something happened while I was out. More importantly, about these supplies…" I pointed.

"The world is going crazy… so I used my own money to buy some supplies," Raymond said.

"T-Thank you, Grandpa," I said.

"*Haha*."

I wanted to entertain him a bit, but I didn't have time for that.

"Have you—"

"If you're talking about that rude man, he's upstairs. He went up there a while ago and hasn't come down since despite having guests here," Raymond interrupted me.

I turned and saw a familiar face.

"*Uh…*"

"…" "Miss No Dam-Hye?" I asked.

"Hello. So…"

"I think she was the one he said he was going to bring," Raymond said.

‘I knew I had a good eye.’

She had probably achieved something in her past life.

“Let’s save the introductions for later. Could you go upstairs and get Mr. Woo Hyo-Yeol for me?” I requested.

“What? Me?” No Dam-Hye asked.

‘Yes, you.’

“Please,” I added.

“M-Me?” No Dam-Hye repeated.

“Yes, please,” I said.

“*Ah…* okay.”

Gramps clearly said that there were guests, right?

I saw three figures next to No Dam-Hye. Unlike her, who came to join our party, they were actual guests. Two of them were unfamiliar faces, but one of them was familiar to me.

Actually, I had seen them many times at the academy.

Yeah, they were from the Flower and Fertility Familia.

“Greetings, Mr. Lee Ki-Young.”

“…”

“…”

“What is the Flower and Fertility Familia—”

“We came because there’s something we need to tell you,” one of them

interrupted me.

“Is it related to the related event?” I asked.

“I can’t tell you the details… but I wanted to ask if you’re willing to join the meeting that is taking place right now…” they asked.

“*Ah*… I see. For now—”

And that was when I heard a voice.

“Go away.”

I turned and saw a confused Woo Hyo-Yeol.

CHAPTER 1131
A COMRADE WHOSE TRUSTWORTHINESS IS UNCERTAIN (16)

"Go away."

I turned and saw a confused Woo Hyo-Yeol.

'This jerk… looks really confused.'

The entire continent was thrown into chaos and confusion by the unexpected event, but I was sure no one was as confused as Woo Hyo-Yeol.

The change was too big to call it a mere butterfly effect, and the incident was so big that it completely distorted the future. He looked annoyed and nervous, as it had only been less than a month since he became a regressor, but he already had to face the Demon King of Sunset.

"…"

"…"

"I told you to go away," Woo Hyo-Yeol repeated.

'But why is he telling them to go away? He must think that he owns this place. This is just another inn in the neighborhood, man.'

He felt the need to express his discomfort to feel better. The visitors from the Family and Fertility Familia looked annoyed, but they couldn't just yell at him for his rudeness. If I wasn't here, they would teach the rookie a lesson.

Fortunately, they didn't respond to his threat and simply looked at me quietly.

“*Whoo…*”

“…”

“I think it’s best if we contact you later,” they said.

“Okay. I’ll be waiting,” I said.

‘He sure has a way of greeting the guests… ‘

“Why did they come here?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“They asked if I could attend a meeting. That was all,” I answered.

“…” After striking a cool pose, he sat in his usual spot. He pretended like nothing was wrong, like it wasn’t a big deal, but I was sure he was on the brink of falling apart.

He didn’t seem like a control freak like Ji-Hye noona, but humans disliked situations that were beyond their control. As a regressor, he probably thought that he was controlling the situation, so he wasn’t happy about this mainstream event.

I actually felt the same way, but what mattered was whether we could hide our emotions or not.

‘No matter how much you think about it, it’s pretty shocking.’

I shook my head and felt worthless thoughts disappearing into thin air.

Since Woo Hyo-Yeol and I were both quiet, the mood quickly died down.

Jung Ha-Yan’s guardians were still on their toes, and No Dam-Hye seemed confused as to why she was here. I had no idea why Jung Ha-Yan was happy, but she smiled while sitting beside me, and Raymond Bolt also remained quiet.

I saw No Dam-Hye's blank expression, and her face seemed to describe our current situation the best.

'Did she get dragged here like she was getting kidnapped?'

Woo Hyo-Yeol wasn't the type to explain things, so she had to have come here without knowing anything.

'Will this work?'

'I don't think it will. Maybe it's not too late to join the Flower and Fertility Familia with Jung Ha-Yan. Can this party clear the Demon King of Sunset's Castle?'

I looked around carefully.

"When… can I… go home?" No Dam-Hye asked with the same blank face.

"Unni… what about us?" Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

"…"

"Are we allowed to stay here?" she added.

"Just be quiet for now," Nam Goong-Seon said.

"*Haha*…"

The old warrior displayed a smile that resembled the typical smile of a grandfather.

"…"

I had no idea why Woo Hyo-Yeol was unhappy, but he was frowning.

This party was pretty weak compared to the party I had with Kim Hyun-Sung, Jung Ha-Yan, Park Deok-Gu, Sun Hee-Young, and Kim Ye-Ri. If possible, I wanted Woo Hyo-Yeol to lead the meeting, but sadly, he didn't possess that

kind of talent.

All he was capable of doing was look at me.

"*Ahem… ahem…*"

"…"

"L-Looks like all the party members are here," I said.

"What? I-I'm a member?" No Dam-Hye asked.

"And we seem to have somewhat of a good formation," I added.

"W-What will I be doing?" No Dam-Hye asked.

"I think we should do a short introduction first. There are people I have never met before… We're short of time, but I want us to get to know each other," I suggested.

"…"

"As a heads up, Mr. Woo Hyo-Yeol will be the leader of the party. It's still too early to discuss what our party is going to do… so I can't tell you the party's goal or how he'll be leading the party in the future, but this will be the permanent party," I added.

"…"

"Before I talk about the details, let's introduce ourselves first. You can go first, Miss No Dam-Hye," I said.

"I-I'm a Level 4 bard… W-Why am I here? Will I be working in the same party? I-I'm not sure why I'm here…" No Dam-Hye said.

"And your name?" I asked.

"I'm… No Dam-Hye," No Dam-Hye answered.

'Okay, that's enough.'

I turned slightly and heard a voice.

"I'm Raymond Bolt. As a Level 4 warrior, I mostly wield a large crossbow and a shield; I have basic knowledge of martial arts. I was part of the Shaded Sun Crown Familia, and after accepting a quest from the Adventurer Guild, I met this young man.

"I have a lot of experience, so I'm sure I'll be really helpful," Raymond said.

Nam Goong-Seon was next, and the part that caught my attention was her calmness. Earlier, she was confused, but now, she had to have finally realized what was going on.

She turned to Lim Chae-Ryeong and whispered something into her ears, but I could see on her face that she had decided to accept this abrupt meeting positively.

'A GENIUS must've given her a hint or something.'

I was sure the biggest reason was that Jung Ha-Yan wouldn't let them leave.

"I'm Nam Goong-Seon, a Level 3 priest. I'm currently serving the Gentle Glow that Reassures the Forgotten. I ended up here after meeting Miss Ha-Yan.

"I have no idea what's going on… Anyway… I'm sure we were fated to meet. I'm looking forward to… working with you all for the time being," Nam Goong-Seon said.

"I'm Lim Chae-Ryeong, a Level 3 thief. My specialties include lockpicking and finding traps. I wield daggers, and I have basic knowledge of poison. *Ah!* I also know simple spells. I was managing a small party with Goong-Seon unni… and…" Lim Chae-Ryeong trailed off.

'She's a classic thief.'

She would become useful once she had received proper training.

I was also convinced that she had more potential than Nam Goong-Seon.

Next was Jung Ha-Yan…

“I-I’m Jung Ha-Yan… a Level 4 mage. I-I’m oppa’s… N-No, I’m not supposed to say anything… Anyway… I look forward to working with you,” she said.

And then.

“I’m Lee Ki-Young, a level 3 priest. I was recently summoned, and I recently graduated from the academy,” I introduced myself.

“I know you! You’re the genius commander, right?” Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

“It’s embarrassing to say… but you’re right, Miss Chae-Ryeong,” I answered.

“It’s amazing that I get to meet a famous person. Don’t you agree, Goong-Seon unni?” she asked.

“Chae-Ryeong, quiet…” Nam Goong-Seon mumbled.

The party leader was the last one to go.

“Woo Hyo-Yeol, a Level 3 swordsman.”

Of course, I wasn’t expecting much from him.

“Looks like the boring introduction is finally over.”

His words were ruining the mood.

“…” “How amusing,” he commented.

“What?”

“It’s absurd. A dying warrior, a priest, and thief who have been Level 3

players for years, as well as a bard who doesn't even know why she's here. Were these nameless players the ones you were saying will fight with us?

"I think the only one who can be called a player here is that mage. You can easily find people on the same level as them if you just walk around the square," he explained.

'Ah, why is he acting grumpy again? Are you worried all of a sudden?'

'And you're the one who brought No Dam-Hye here… '

"I want to ask the priest and thief something. How much actual experience do you have? Have you cleared a dungeon before?" he asked.

"I don't have experience clearing a dungeon yet, but she did it once! We have a pretty high success rate… when it comes to party hunting…" Lim Chae-Ryeong answered.

"*Haa.*"

Woo Hyo-Yeol immediately looked at me and showed me an arrogant face. It was like he was trying to prove a point. He looked like he was asking me about how we were going to clear a dungeon with members like them.

"It's obvious what kind of monsters you've hunted so far," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"T-Then do you have experience clearing a dungeon? From what I know, you graduated from the academy recently as well, Mr. Woo Hyo-Yeol," Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

"…"

"You're being rude. Technically speaking, we arrived in Rohen before you, so we're more experienced than you," Lim Chae-Ryeong complained.

It sounded ridiculous to him, but I was sure he couldn't argue because he was a rookie.

“Damn it. I shouldn’t have come here in the first place.”

All he could do was talk to himself, but I was sure he didn’t mean his words, as he had decided to listen to me for now. He was just nervous because it was noisy outside.

‘I would have a hard time keeping my composure as well if I were in his shoes.’

No one would remain sane upon hearing the chaos outside and knowing the fact that the world had changed overnight. I was sure he didn’t want to discuss working as a party and preferred growing strong as soon as possible. I was sure he wanted to go out there and find out more about this mainstream event as well as why it even happened.

The fact that he was even here was surprising. I wouldn’t be surprised if he suddenly packed up his things and left, but he had to have realized that this was his home now.

For now…

‘I need to calm him down for now.’

If I were to leave him like this, he’d keep looking at me with that annoyed face of his.

“I’m sure you’re confused, and the Demon King of Sunset mainstream event must be the reason behind it. It’s kind of messy, but our party won’t get involved in this event,” I announced.

“What do you mean?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“It’s like I said. Until we’ve stabilized things between us, we won’t get involved in the mainstream event at all. There’s too little information about this event for us to contribute by going around the outskirts.

“When you look at the bigger picture, it’s not so bad for our party. The continent will focus on the Demon King’s Castle, which means the majority

of the dungeons and hunting grounds will become open.

“Small and mid-sized familias will sell information about dungeons at a cheap price in order to get funds, so getting information will be easy,” I explained.

“Do you know how foolish it is not to get involved in a mainstream event?” Woo Hyo-Yeol argued.

“We won’t miss it. We’re just going to wait. I guarantee that the familias going on an expedition to the Demon King of Sunset’s Castle will fail. We’ll be raiding a dungeon nearby either tomorrow or the day after tomorrow,” I said.

“Forget about the dungeon. Do you have proof? Proof that they’ll fail? The Flower and Fertility Familia that you love so much are probably going to join this expedition. Don’t you think that’s the reason those idiots from earlier are still waiting outside?” he asked.

“The Flower and Fertility Familia won’t be participating in this expedition,” I revealed.

“What?”

“The Flower and Fertility Familia, as well as all the familias that are in alliance with them, will not participate in the expedition,” I said.

“…”

“…”

Perhaps it was because I said it so shamelessly and confidently, but he seemed to calm down a bit. The annoyed face he had shown to me earlier was disappearing slowly.

“They’re going to do the same thing as us,” I added.

“…”

"…"

Obviously, this wasn't easy because…

"*Ha!* Don't make me laugh! Genius commander? Master William, are you really going to entrust the fate of our alliance to this lunatic?"

There was always someone who would make ridiculous remarks.

CHAPTER 1132
IMPACT (1)

Like our continent, the Rohen Continent's waters were muddy and deep; there were many vested interests to consider, such as businesses and dungeon expeditions.

Small familias need not worry about many things, but major familias were different.

The small familias only had to worry about obtaining supplies and some specific items, but the major familias had to spend a lot of money and manpower for a single expedition.

With that in mind, they had to be deeply involved in businesses to obtain some funds.

In addition, most familias had created strategic alliances to maintain and protect their businesses.

Sending reinforces to isolated familias and watching the familias leave for an expedition was something we often did on our continent as well. The Blue Guild was in an alliance with the Red Mercenary Guild and the Black Swan Guild.

The only difference between us and them was that they had another reason behind why they had decided to create an alliance. The familias had formed an alliance because their GENIUSES were close.

Even if the familias didn't get along or had different plans, they were forced to enter an alliance because that was what their GENIUSES had chosen to do.

They were in that kind of situation.

The five major familias were allied with the Flower and Fertility Familia, and they gathered in Scandia, their base.

It wasn't just the major familias. I didn't know their names, but I saw representatives of mid-sized familias as well. The leaders of the major familias were on a level slightly lower than the old Eight Seats, and although they appeared to be weaker than Cheon Kwan-Wi and Yu Ran, they looked fancier than them.

'They spent a lot of money.'

The room was too fancy to call it a simple meeting room.

It was like I was looking at a prayer room in the Vatican. Every face in this room looked proud, and it was probably because they were the top players on the Rohen Continent.

The adjutants who had come here with the leaders of the familias were standing behind their respective leaders while exuding a menacing aura. Thanks to their demeanor, the meeting was pretty tense.

'They all think they're the best.'

It was pretty different from the meetings held in Lindel, which were always filled with laughter.

"The Guardian of Fate and Time Familia is already preparing for the expedition."

"They're moving as if they had expected this to happen. Are you sure we didn't get any information about this mainstream event?"

"Nothing was announced. According to the rumors, no information was released, but…"

"How can we trust the words of those cunning bastards?"

“I don’t think it really matters whether they had prior information or not. It doesn’t necessarily mean that they have the advantage. The mainstream event started not too long ago as well.”

“I think we should start the briefing rather than continue this meaningless discussion. I’m sure everyone is aware of this incident, but…”

Obviously, the Flower and Fertility Familia was the leader of the meeting.

“I’m Emilia of the Flower and Fertility Familia. As all of you are already aware, the Demon King of Sunset mainstream event started today at 5:45 PM.

“It occurred in the entire eastern region… and we believe the eastern region has been completely paralyzed. Right after the mainstream began, we lost connection with the familias and major cities that are using the eastern region as their base…” Emilia paused.

“…”

“In addition, the rangers who left to find out what happened to those familias have all gone missing as well. We are unable to confirm what’s happening in the eastern region, but I know that the King of the Underground Familia and the Guardian of Fate and Time Familia are attempting to enter the dungeon,” Emilia added.

“How ridiculous.”

“Other powerful familias are gathering there as well. They’ve either been hired by the two familias or have established an alliance with each other.”

‘The information isn’t even that important.’

One could easily make such a deduction without actually being there.

Basically, Emilia spent five minutes explaining Rohen’s situation and another five minutes explaining that they couldn’t find any information about the

mainstream event. It was pretty boring, but they had to have thought that this was important because I saw people listening to her.

“Can I ask a question?”

“Go ahead,” Emilia answered.

“What about the Demon King of Sunset? Did you not get any information from the Goddess of Flower and Fertility?”

“The Goddess of Flower and Fertility is careful of what she says… but one thing we’re sure of is that the Demon King of Sunset wasn’t originally part of the 72 Legions. After annihilating Marthym, the Commander of the 21st Legion, he took their spot and became a great demon lord,” Emilia answered.

“We’re already aware of that.”

“We don’t know why he’s here… but it can’t be for anything good. If his goal were to gain power, then he wouldn’t have gone this far just to descend here. We believe he has some kind of purpose for coming here,” Emilia added.

‘That’s such an obvious answer.’

It was clear that they were lacking information, but one thing I was able to figure out through this meeting was that the Flower and Fertility Familia had more influence than I thought.

“I would like to ask a question as well.”

“Yes, Miss Francoise?”

“I want to know why an outsider was invited to this meeting…” Francoise asked.

‘I was waiting for someone to ask. This is embarrassing.’

Her question made everyone look at me. I wasn’t part of the Flower and

Fertility Familia, and I was a rookie who had just created a small party in Harizel, so why was I here?

Why did William bring me here? Of course, I was sure they had heard of my name at the very least.

“I didn’t think you would bring the genius who caused a commotion in Rohen to this meaningless meeting…” Francoise commented.

“Before I answer your question, there’s one thing I would like to say, and it’s that Mr. Lee Ki-Young isn’t an outsider. He is located in Harizel at the moment, but he serves the Goddess of Flower and Fertility, so technically, he’s a member of our familia. Please keep that in mind and show respect to Mr. Lee Ki-Young,” William explained.

‘Just as I expected, he has some real backbone.’

Francoise, who called me an outsider, nodded quietly, signaling that she understood what William was saying.

“I was being rude. Will you accept my apology?” Francoise asked.

I wasn’t really offended, but I started taking an interest in her.

“*Hmm…*”

Unlike that extra over there who was sizing me up from top to bottom.

“Of course, I’ve heard of the genius commander. I remember him causing quite the commotion on the continent last week… I even saw that mock battle. I was pretty impressed,” Francoise said.

“…”

“I’m curious about… your insight into the battlefield, your performance that seemed like you were trying to show off, the things that are in your mind, and if you’re even a human being. Do you have a map in your head? Or do

you have eyes that can oversee the battlefield? *Ah!* You don't have to answer. I already know you're competent," Francoise said.

"…"

"But William. This incident and your guest being a competent player are two different things. We can't entrust the fate of the alliance to a rookie. Do you understand what I'm saying? Of course, this isn't a bad idea for his debut as an adjutant…" Francoise explained.

'Do I have to debut as an adjutant? I'm not the type to debut as an adjutant, damn it.'

"But he doesn't seem good enough for us to trust him with something like this," Francoise continued.

'What the hell? I don't want to carry you guys either.'

Debuting as someone's adjutant was ridiculous, and I obviously had no intention of cleaning up after anyone.

"It's nothing like that. The reason I invited him here is…" William paused.

"…"

Was it my turn now?

"To stop all of you," I said.

The room immediately became quiet. William and Emilia also looked around quietly. I already said what was on my mind, but they probably hadn't expected me to be so blunt about it.

"This expedition is doomed to fail," I added.

"…"

“The King of the Underground Familia and the Guardian of Fate and Time Familia will be defeated, and only a few survivors will return. If there are survivors, it’d be a miracle.

“I’m sure all of you are aware that the Rohen Continent is in a state of panic because of the sudden mainstream event. To prepare for the unexpected expedition, the major familias are using as much money as they can, but supplies are still running low.

“This is likely temporary,” I explained.

“…”

“I guarantee that once the first victim appears, things will quiet down as if none of this has ever happened,” I added.

“He must be a prophet, not a genius,” an insignificant extra joked, and someone chuckled.

“The average level here is Level 5, correct? The adjustants of mid-sized guilds seem to be above Level 4… but I believe the demon lords are at least Level 7, even with the penalty they would receive upon descending here. The adjutants under them are at least Level 6. For those of you who don’t know how powerful a Level 7 is…” I paused.

“…”

“If the GENIUSES descend to the real world, they’ll be Level 7. The difference isn’t just what’s visible to the naked eye. The unseen difference is even greater,” I continued.

“…”

“The reason we must minimize the first wave of casualties is that the demon lords need sacrifices to maintain their form here. It’ll probably be easier to understand if I say that they need humans in the eastern region to recharge the mana that’s necessary to maintain their summons,” I added.

"…"

"The enemies can expand their area of influence through sacrifices. It's only the eastern region at the moment, but the more casualties there are, the bigger the area the grayish sunset will cover. The Demon King of Sunset is injured, but the fact that no troops are defending against the enemy suggests that it's likely a trap," I explained.

"…"

"…"

"Where did you get all that information from?" Francoise asked.

"From a book," I answered.

I couldn't tell them that I was close to the Demon King of Sunset, so I brought dozens of thick books for proof. There were books written by black mages, and books that were related to the demon summoning incident that actually happened in Rohen in the past.

"Does that book say that the demon lords' levels are Level 7?" Francoise asked.

"Of course not. I simply interpreted it on my own based on the information written in the books… and to be honest, I think they're higher than Level 7. The commander who was summoned here before was rank 58 among the legions," I answered.

The room became quiet.

Just as I questioned whether they were going to take me seriously or not, the insignificant extra from earlier laughed. "*Haha*."

He was being rude, but…

'That asshole… '

What was even ruder was what happened afterward.

“Looks like the genius commander is planning on learning about the Rohen Continent through books.”

I heard them laughing again.

‘Wow, these jerks… ‘

“*Hahahaha.*”

“*Hahaha!*”

“You’re going too far with your jokes! *Hahahaha!*”

“*Hahahahahahaha!*”

I immediately realized that they were treating me like a child ignorant about the world.

CHAPTER 1133
IMPACT (2)

"*Hahahahaha.*"

"*Hahahaha!*"

"You've taken your joke too far! *Hahahaha!*"

"*Hahahahahahaha!*"

They were treating me like a child ignorant about the world.

'These idiots are getting on my nerves.'

"…"

"…"

"So, *hahaha!* So, what does the genius commander plan on doing? Are you going to read another book? *Hahaha*."

"*Hahahahaha!*"

They'll mock me no matter what I say, but I can't stay quiet. Regardless of whether they mocked me or not, I needed to show that I was right. For now, I had no choice but to tell them the plan that even I thought was ridiculous.

"My party is going to use Harizel as our base. We're going to purchase information about a dungeon from a guild that's selling it for cheap in order to raise funds. While Rohen is focused on the Demon King's Castle, we're going to clear a Level 3 dung—"

"*Hahahahaha!*"

"*Hahahahahahaha!*"

"*Hahahahaha!*"

"I see. Yes, you should start with a Level 3 dungeon!"

"*Hahahahahahaha!*"

They weren't even trying to hide it anymore. Bringing laughter to the tense meeting room was a remarkable achievement, but this wasn't what I wanted.

As a rookie, I couldn't help but feel confused.

"*Uh… ah…* S-So…" I stuttered and lowered my head out of shame.

I tried to explain the evidence that could support the argument I had made earlier with a barely audible voice, but of course, these jerks weren't going to listen to me.

Someone with a tender heart would probably cry in this situation, and the wound in their heart would be so deep that they would never recover from it.

However, I had always been a stubborn one, so I didn't lose courage even amidst the mocking.

Of course, it was also because…

Boom!

It was also because I knew William was going to slam his hand on the table.

The room immediately became quiet, as no one had ever laughed.

William's red face showed everyone his fury.

It was probably because the owner of the Flower and Fertility Familia was being ridiculed, or he couldn't stand the laughter in the meeting room, but I

knew he was going to step in.

He was so passionate that I was grateful for him.

“I’m sure I…” William paused.

“…”

“I’m sure I told all of you that Mr. Lee Ki-Young is a member of the Flower and Fertility Familia,” William continued.

“…”

“Can I consider your actions just now as an insult to the Flower and Fertility Familia?” William asked.

‘This is nice.’

Normally, they would take control of the meeting, but these people had to have thought that his threat was a warning. They started talking slyly, as if trying to show that they were a member of the five major familias.

“I’m sorry, Mr. William.”

“It looks like we went a bit too far.”

“I’m not the one you should be apologizing to,” William said.

‘They just don’t want to apologize to me.’

Their twitching eyebrows indicated that they were feeling uncomfortable, but they weren’t dumb.

“I’m sorry.”

“We took the joke a little too far.”

“I’m sorry, Genius Commander. Did we offend you?”

Their apology was completely different from when they apologized to William.

“Please understand, Genius Commander. If you were here a bit sooner, you’d understand our reaction,” Francoise said.

“…”

The arrogant fool then added, asking, “Before we hear that brilliant plan of yours… I want to ask a question. Do you really think there will be an expedition in a world where danger doesn’t exist?”

“…”

“In this place, the more dangerous the expedition is, the more rewards you will earn. Are you saying all of that while knowing how the Flower and Fertility Familia developed? How can we not laugh when a member of the familia, who had made the biggest contribution during the invasion of a mainstream monster, is saying such things?”

“That’s…” I mumbled.

“At the time, everyone said it was impossible, but William managed to achieve it. Genius Commander, experts like you all said that it was impossible. When they said we needed to retreat because we had no chance, it was William, the city’s hero, who turned the tables with a swing of his sword.

“Do you really think that the others here are any different from him? There are Level 3 players who cleared Level 5 dungeons, and there are familias who defeated a drake, despite not knowing how to defeat it at the time,” Francoise said.

‘They’re bragging just because they took down a few drakes.’

“Chance, impossible, and danger are words that we’ve heard so many times… it’s pretty funny…” Francoise mumbled.

"…"

"If you think you can figure out everything about Rohen just by reading a few books, you're mistaken. Do you think we're stupid?" Francoise asked.

'Yeah, you are stupid.'

"No one here thinks this dungeon is going to be easy. Not enough information? It happens, but if we don't do anything just because we know nothing, how can we get the information we need? Sure, we may look stupid in your eyes since you have such a smart brain.

"It's fine if you think we're a bunch of reckless, careless fools because most of us never properly learned military tactics. But you know, we remember the lessons we learned while getting to where we are today," Francoise explained.

"…"

"Nothing will get resolved if we don't face it head-on," Francoise said.

"…"

"And we won't get anything out of it. We can't climb the ladder, and we'll always remain in the same place. Do you…" she paused.

"…"

"Understand what I'm saying?" Francoise asked.

The idiot looked pretty satisfied after her lecture.

A few of the other idiots were agreeing with her words, with their nostrils flaring. It seemed like they were trying to cosplay as tough guys, but in my eyes, they survived because they were just lucky.

I was sure they had gone through the process of increasing their chances of

survival by becoming stronger and wearing powerful items, but that was all. Their command system was primitive, and the process of preparing for hunts and expeditions was so underdeveloped that it was hard to take them seriously.

To put it bluntly, the only reason they had survived this long was that they had yet to meet an opponent that they couldn't handle. I was sure that one wrong move and half of these guys would die.

Monster invasion? Level 5 dungeons? Drakes instead of dragons? I had no idea how many mainstream events they had experienced so far, but the Demon King of Sunset wasn't an opponent that they could handle by taking chances.

Would they be able to say the same thing even while standing before a being they couldn't handle? Even if they were prepared, it wouldn't be enough, but they actually wanted to decide after facing *him* first?

Rohen wasn't a world where one could try again upon death.

'If you die, that's it.'

If they wanted to know his attack patterns as well as the size of the dungeon, they had to establish a safe zone within the grayish sunset zone.

"But…"

"No matter what you say, we're not going to listen to you. *Ah*. I'd like to apologize for my rudeness earlier. It was just… funny. Now do you understand why we laughed?" Francoise asked and glanced at William.

It was like she was asking what he thought. She wanted to know if he agreed with them and if he was one of them.

'You're not leaving your roots, are you?'

'Even if every one of them turns against me, Will won't. You're on my side,

right?'

Of course, I didn't need to worry. It seemed like the effects of the mocking incident were still there because he wasn't staring at them in a kind way.

"Are we wrong, William?" Francoie asked.

"…"

"…"

Just then, a bombshell was dropped, and the impact was devastating.

"The Flower and Fertility Familia will stay out of this," William said.

Their reaction was obvious.

"What?"

"Are you serious right now?"

"Really, Master William?"

"*Haa…"*

"How foolish."

"Could you at least tell us the reason?'

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young has already told you the reason. The Flower and Fertility Familia cannot gamble on things where the results are uncertain," he answered.

"I can't believe you would say that… *Haa…* Those aren't exactly the words you'd expect from the city's hero."

"We already lost many comrades and family members. We gained many things because we tried and tried again, but how could you forget that we

lost many things, too? I finally realized that I can't keep living life on the edge, like walking on a tightrope," William explained.

"You've become a coward."

They gnashed their teeth, and their reaction made it seem like someone was going to die soon. To make things worse, I could hear screams everywhere. They just didn't want their powers to weaken because if the most influential familia refused to join them, then the strength of their alliance would weaken.

"This is absurd!"

"We have an alliance! How dare you back out at the critical juncture? Are you out of your mind?!"

"Can we consider this as your way of breaking the alliance?"

"*Ha!* How ridiculous. Master William, are you truly planning on entrusting the fate of our alliance to this lunatic?"

"…"

"…"

"Lunatic?" William said.

"…"

"I'm sure I made myself clear that Mr. Lee Ki-Young isn't a guest. He's a family member of the Flower and Fertility Familia. If you insult him again…"
William paused.

"What else would you call him except a lunatic? Why should we listen to the words of an idiot who doesn't know anything?!"

William was a guy full of principles, but he would never show respect to

thugs who were daring enough to insult his family. He looked as if he were going to stand up this instant and remove his gloves.

If Emilia hadn't held him back, he would have *really* removed his gloves.

"Watch what you say."

"You… You really want to fight?!"

"Stop! Please stop! There's no reason for us to fight here. *Whoo…* I knew this was going to happen someday—*tsk*. We'll give you time to think, Master William. Are you really not going to participate in the upcoming expedition?" Francoise asked.

"Not right now," William answered.

"*Tsk, tsk…* It's sad, but it looks like this is where our alliance ends," Francoise said.

"That's what I wanted," William said.

"Keep in mind that even if you visit later, the alliance will no longer be available for you," Francoise warned.

William stood up as if her warning wasn't worth answering.

Despite the fact that Emilia was feeling anxious, he still bowed toward me.

"I'll apologize in their place. I don't know what to say…" William said.

"…"

"No, I should be—"

Bam!

The door was kicked open, and we heard an urgent voice.

“U-Urgent news!” the messenger exclaimed.

“What?”

“The King of the Underground Familia has entered the grayish sunset zone,” they announced.

“Damn it! Those jerks are already making a move?”

“They failed to create a safe zone… in the grayish sunset zone. Most of them are missing… a-and there’s… only o-one survivor…” they stuttered.

‘See? I knew that was going to happen.’

“They’re overwhelmed by fear and are suffering from hallucinations. I-It happened… within twenty minutes… of entering the grayish sunset zone…” they added.

“…”

“To make things worse, they haven’t encountered the Demon King of Sunset… They’re saying that they encountered… a woman wielding a spear while riding a black dragon,” they added.

‘The round one’s going to be tough… ‘

CHAPTER 1134
IMPACT (3)

"To make things worse, they haven't encountered the Demon King of Sunset… They're saying that they encountered… a woman wielding a spear while riding a black dragon," the messenger reported.

"…"

They couldn't believe it.

"Do you have the battle logs?" I asked.

"We haven't confirmed exactly what kind of battle took place, but…" they paused.

I was the fool for expecting anything.

"In that case, is there a way I can meet the survivors myself?" I asked.

"The King of the Underground Familia probably won't share any information. Those cunning bastards…"

'Unwilling to share information? Even in this chaotic situation?'

"No. If we send a second expedition team and a rescue team, there'd be no reason for them to withhold the information," I said.

"*Ha!* You know nothing. Even if they agree to share the information, what can we obtain from a survivor who had gone mad with fear?" one of them argued.

"I'm sure there's a reason why they sent a survivor back here. It's to either show off their power… or for a different reason," I said.

They had probably shoved some kind of recording orb in the pocket of that survivor, but even if that wasn't the case, we could probably still get a hint. Normally, whenever one failed a dungeon raid, one would question the survivor and find out what had happened from that survivor.

Even if they were too terrified to communicate properly, one could still get a ton of information from them.

'It applies even more in situations like this.'

I was sure they knew that spreading fear throughout Rohen would give them the advantage.

I knew that Kim Hyun-Sung wouldn't actually come here alone, but the situation became clearer in my eyes when I heard that Hye-Jin and Dialugia were here as well.

'It's too organized.'

It was too organized to say that he had just defeated a single commander and claimed the 21st Legion. I was starting to think that Ji-Hye noona, Belial, or perhaps even Lucifer was involved in this.

I wasn't underestimating Kim Hyun-Sung, but there were too many questionable things to say that Kim Hyun-Sung had done all this on his own.

'So you summoned Hye-Jin and Dialugia?'

They were summoned here as demons, not as humans. Jo Hye-Jin had been accumulating holy power for a while now, but getting a visa as the commander's adjutant was a completely different story.

It was safe to assume that the one who issued her the visa was behind all this.

Perhaps the entire Blue Guild, Rafael, Hee-Ra noona, and Kasugano Yuno had come here as members of the 21st Legion, but I still couldn't figure out how

they had managed to do that.

I was sure that if I were to search all the dimensions, there would only be a handful of cases where people were summoned this way.

This could only be done by someone who knew the system well. The one who found a loophole in the system and made sure that the system would agree to the arrangement was Kim Hyun-Sung's helper.

Given the situation, it was suspicious that they spared only one person.

Since the 21st Legion needed to gather as many resources as possible in the Ashen Sunset Region, I was sure they didn't want the players to get scared and stay away from the region instead.

I was sure they hadn't killed those people yet.

I was sure the King of the Underground Familia and the first expedition group were in the mana factories, waiting to be rescued. Their goal was to share information about Dialugia and Jo Hye-Jin and give others hope in clearing the dungeon.

Just as I expected, another messenger ran into the meeting room while gasping for breath.

"J-Just now… the King of the Underground Familia has sent an orb. They're asking if we're willing to join the second expedition team that will be officially formed later. They said they're willing to offer full support…"

'I knew it.'

I was just about to run out of the meeting room, but no one complained about me staying here. Everyone remained quiet because things were happening too fast, and that's when the orb started playing a footage.

— Prepare for battle! Prepare for battle!!!

— There’s an unidentified enemy in the front. There’s an unidentified enemy in the front!

— Formation! The formation, everyone!

It wasn’t even an ambush.

‘Damn it.’

A figure covered in dark greenish armor descended amidst the players while sitting on a black dragon. Seeing them quietly and slowly show themselves as if that place had always been their nest made them look noble.

People started screaming at the sight of them.

— *Aaaahh!*

— *AAAAAH!*

— *AAAAH!* Die! You monster!!!

— What… what is this…

— *AAAAHHHH!*

— *Aaaah!*

The allied troops would sustain a ton of damage every time the figure on the black dragon threw her spear at them.

The black dragon either swung its giant tail or used its claws to prevent the vanguards from getting closer to it. Its pattern wasn’t difficult, but it was impactful.

Each time there was a flash of light, a spear would pierce three or four people, causing them to fall to the ground as if they were meat on a skewer. To make things worse, the people stuck on the spear were shriveled up.

I was sure either their mana or life was getting sucked out of them.

— *Ahhh!*

— Damn it! Dodge! What are the vanguards doing?!

— Magic shield! Magic shield Anything is fine, so just cast a spell!

— Block that! Damn… *Cough!*

A long spear pierced a dozen people holding up their shields. The armored figure looked like she was carrying out a simple task in a boring manner, and it seemed like the black dragon had no need to unleash even a Breath against the attackers.

Overall, this was a strange sight to me.

— *Aaaah!*

— *Ah… ugh…* don't come near me! Don't come! Don't coooome! Please! Pleeease…! don't come this way!

'What's… wrong with you?'

Of course, it was a strange sight. After all, Jo Hye-Jin was the embodiment of lawful good. She had delivered countless memorable lines such as "Don't tarnish his pride."

Despite that, she was tossing spears at these people as if they were mere insects.

I didn't hear anything beneath the mask.

The blue glow in her eyes was the only sign that she was, in fact, human.

— *Ahhhhh!*

— *Cough…* I… I… don't want to die. *Ahh…*

— *Ahhhh…* save me… Mom…

— I… I…

Spears rained down without hesitation, and even those crawling away weren't spared.

— *Roooooooooooar!*

Something red scattered all over the place.

The black dragon took a step, and I heard an unpleasant noise. Instead of loud screams, I heard faint groans. The events unfolding under the ashen sunset were too brutal and cruel for it to be described with the word "hopeless."

"…"

"…"

Obviously, silence filled the room.

No matter how experienced a player was, no one would smile at the sight of blood and flesh splattering all over the place.

"They terribly… strong…"

"…"

"But I don't think it's to the point that we need to be afraid of them…"

'…'

"Don't you agree?"

'I have no idea.'

There was definitely a reason why they were thinking that way, and even I

thought that this dungeon could be cleared. First of all, the attack patterns were simple. Secondly, the familia's attempt earlier showed us that it was possible to clear this dungeon.

'So we just need to block the spears, right?'

They managed to give us decent information. Blocking the spears raining down from a distance and knocking the figure on the black dragon would be the basic strategy here. It seemed like they were attacked before they could do anything, but their overall stats were low, so they were quite useless.

Their strategy against the dungeon wasn't wrong.

'The pattern is too simple.'

When designing a dungeon, the boss monster needed to have set patterns; the difficulty and the overall strategy against the boss monster would be determined by its patterns.

Jin Cheong was a good example of this.

Just like all other dungeons, it was highly likely the Demon King of Sunset was built the same way. The difficulty of dungeons had always been rising progressively, so the strategies that could be used against the first named monster were limited, but…

'Did they have to make Hye-Jin the first named monster? And why are her patterns so simple?'

It was a waste of talent, and I was sure the patterns after the first phase would be simple as well.

After knocking the figure off the black dragon, we'd have to attack the two bosses at the same time, and once they entered phase three, Dialugia would fly into the sky and unleash Breathe, or Hye-Jin would be left alone in the final battle.

That was the biggest problem, but the pattern itself was simple.

'She's either a card to be discarded or a card to lure these guys in.'

Or perhaps there was a reason why Jo Hye-Jin had no choice but to take on this task…

I couldn't help but think that this was the only role that they could assign to her because of her gentle nature. The role required her to hunt humans, but at least she didn't have to kill them.

"If we do create a second expedition group, had the King of the Underground Familia mentioned what kind of reward they'd give us?" one of them asked.

"They'll surely offer a hefty reward since we're putting everything on the line to rescue them. More importantly, there's a high chance that we can lead this expedition ourselves," another chimed in.

"The rewards won't just come from the King of the Underground Familia. This is a mainstream event, and the GENIUSES will surely promote it by saying that they'll be giving away coins," they said.

I saw scared people, but their desire for a reward seemed to outweigh their fear.

"Had the other familias said that they were going to join?" one of them asked.

"I'm sure the familias in the north and the west will join us," they answered.

Another suggested, "They must be waiting for us to rescue them, so we should go in as soon as possible, but we should still take our time."

"That's true. No matter how tempting the reward is, we should at least make basic preparations. Stupid fools… they got a bit too hasty, but it's a good thing for us," they said.

"At least two weeks. No… maybe three weeks to prepare?" another asked.

'At least I won't get robbed by these idiots.'

They would most likely create a safe zone after a certain period of time.

The players of Rohen had to gather in the safe zone within the Ashen Sunset Region.

"Mr. William… what do you think? If you've changed your mind…" they asked.

William glanced at me, seemingly asking for my opinion.

However, I had no choice but to shake my head.

'They're unreasonable.'

"There's no reason to stay here. Let's go, Mr. William," I suggested.

"Okay."

"Master William…" one of them called out.

"…"

"Are you really not going to join us?" they asked.

"…"

"If you leave now, you're really going to regret it," they warned.

"…"

"…"

"If you managed to create a safe zone, I suggest you stop there. This is my last warning," William said.

"*Ha!*"

"…"

"Still as arrogant as ever."

'I hope… '

"He knows nothing…"

'…Hye-Jin sends all of these assholes to hell.'

In two weeks, I was sure these assholes would wait for us to be rescued while in skewers as if they were human kebabs.

"You'll regret listening to that idiot's words! William!" they shouted.

CHAPTER 1135
FALLEN KING'S TOMB (1)

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young…"

"…"

"Are you alright, Mr. Lee Ki-Young?"

"…"

I had to be looking unwell because William was looking at me worriedly and nervously. I realized that I had been silent for a while, lost in thought about Hyejin, which had to have made William's kind heart feel worried about me.

For a moment, I was puzzled, but I stayed silent a little longer to observe him, and I understood why he was so worried.

"You must be going through a lot. But… but no one can blame you for this. I don't know if my words will be of any comfort, but…" William paused.

"…"

"We can't save everyone," William continued.

He seemed to be thinking that I was troubled about abandoning the survivors in the Ashen Sunset Region.

'It's understandable.'

Dark Hyejin's appearance had confused me so much that I couldn't grasp how William was perceiving me at the moment. Naturally, I displayed a melancholic expression once again. Instead of answering William, I displayed a gloomy and distant expression.

It wasn't the best alternative, but I lowered my head, and clear tears began falling down my cheeks.

Who wouldn't want to save them?

Ignoring those in pain was unlike the Saint of Flower and Fertility. I acted strong and confident, but behind the facade of a genius commander, I was still just a twenty-three-year-old young adult from Earth.

I was still clinging to the habits of my life on Earth.

William understood that abandoning them was not an easy choice for me.

'It's frustrating… '

The fact that I had no choice but to wait and the fact that I was utterly powerless to protect them made me feel infuriated.

I gnashed my teeth and clenched my fists because I was powerless.

I tried to hold back the tears, but I couldn't.

I already knew the truth.

The Beginner's Trial taught me that saving everyone was impossible, but despite that, the sense of despair enveloping me refused to leave me.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young…" Emilia mumbled.

Emilia standing next to William was also looking at me with a slightly bitter expression. She had to be thinking that it was too soon for me to experience the pains of growing up.

"I'm fine, Miss Emilia…" I reassured her.

Of course, the only way to deal with this was to bite down and tough it out.

"…"

“This is no time to be sad,” I added.

“If it’s too much… you don’t have to force yourself. You really don’t need to—”

“No. I am also a citizen of Rohen and a member of the Flower and Fertility familia. Just because I haven’t been here long doesn’t mean I can ignore this. Besides, you asked for my help, Mr. William,” I interrupted him.

William immediately focused. He had to be thinking that I was going to say something important.

‘I like that kind of focus.’

I could never expect Woo Hyo-Yeol to show the same expression as him.

I could tell William was listening closely so that he wouldn’t miss out on anything I was about to say.

“We need to focus on conserving our strength and growing stronger. The allied families of the Flower and Fertility familia must do that, at least for now,” I explained.

“I see.”

“This is going to be a lengthy battle. Even if our enemies want a short battle, we must plan for a prolonged fight. Sending out an expedition team right now would be really… really reckless. They’ll probably…” I trailed off.

“We won’t be able to stop them,” William remarked.

“It will be tough, but please try to stop them,” I begged.

‘Was her name Francoise? She didn’t laugh, so make sure to look after her.’

This situation was the same as when we had to increase the overall stats of our allies before the war with the Outer Gods. Back then, we had to seal Han

Sora to trigger Jung Ha-Yan's awakening.

The problem was that we were running out of time. Overall, there were a few named players with great potential, but compared to the Demon King of Sunset's Castle, they were weak.

'I need to create a distraction to buy time.'

Starting a war could be an option. What if I shifted their focus from the mainstream event to a danger right in front of them? If not that, then we'd need to keep creating a distraction that would stall them.

Kim Hyun-Sung probably knew my location. He was probably trying to expand the Ashen Sunset Region as efficiently as possible, so if I were to spread rumors that fragments of my memories were hidden somewhere on the Rohen Continent, we could buy ourselves a few months.

"Well… I'll be heading out now, Mr. William," I said.

"Okay."

"…"

"Excuse me… Mr. Lee Ki-Young. I heard you'll be raiding dungeons soon," William said.

"I can't just sit by and watch. I… need to work hard so that I can be an asset to Rohen," I told him.

"If that's what you desire…" William mumbled. I felt like he was disappointed. He probably believed that I'd be more useful by helping with the expeditions instead of running around, but I also needed to train my party members.

If this were as simple as leveling up, I wouldn't go this far.

'Regressors are bound to grow stronger on their own, anyway.'

Woo Hyo-Yeol would grow stronger regardless of what was going to happen. The only difference was how fast or slow his growth was going to be.

The important part was building a bond with him, which was why I had chosen Woo Hyo-Yeol over William. Whether I could use the Regressor Instruction Manual on the certain individual or not was the key here.

Personally, even if Woo Hyo-Yeol reached the maximum level, I felt like he still wouldn't be able to defeat Kim Hyun-Sung.

Woo Hyo-Yeol had a lot of potential, but there was no way he could defeat Kim Hyun-Sung, who had been meticulously nurtured by the Masked Hero for decades.

If I wanted him to defeat Kim Hyun-Sung, I'd have to connect with him using the Regressor Instruction Manual. By then, I would be able to use Woo Hyo-Yeol in the most efficient way possible, and I could find an opening as well, as I knew Kim Hyun-Sung's pattern and habits.

'This ability is triggered by our bond, after all.'

That was why I was focusing on Woo Hyo-Yeol…

"…"

"So… how was the meeting?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"The first expedition team was annihilated. The King of the Underground Familia is creating a second expedition team as well as a rescue team, but… they'll likely get annihilated as well," I answered.

"And the Flower and Fertility Familia?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"They won't be participating in the expedition. Even if they do, they'll be the last ones to join. Let me remind you again that, at the moment, the mainstream event is as dangerous as drinking from a poisoned cup. If you're determined to—"

“Are you saying that we should just not care?” Woo Hyo-Yeol interrupted me.

“No, keeping an eye on Rohen’s current affairs is important. I actually want you to be interested in it more than anything, but right now… we need to focus on the dungeon in front of us,” I explained.

“…”

“…”

“You’re worrying about nothing. Isn’t it just a Level 3 dungeon?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“It’s our first expedition. I want us to clear it safely and without any issues,” I said.

‘But I’m not even sure if I can get close to this guy.’

I couldn’t figure out his thoughts.

Anyway, I had to keep walking because I had to show that I had rejected the Flower and Fertility Familia and joined these guys instead. The party members looked kind of worried, which bothered me.

Old man Raymond Bolt, Ha-Yan, and Woo Hyo-Yeol seemed indifferent about it, but Nam Goong-Seon and Lim Chae-Ryeong were clearly nervous. I was sure Lim Chae-Ryeong was especially nervous since she’d never entered a dungeon before.

To make things worse, No Dam-Hye looked as if she was questioning why she was here.

When I stepped forward, a familiar message appeared…

[You’ve entered the Level 3 dungeon: the Fallen King’s Tomb.]

True to its name, the Fallen King’s Tomb was structured like an underground

mausoleum, and since the dungeon's entrance resembled an underground stone chamber, the interior was exactly what I expected it to be.

My voice echoed loudly, so my party members could hear me clearly even if I was whispering.

"We've already gone over this, but I'll review it again just to make sure," I said.

"…"

"This isn't a dangerous dungeon. I chose a relatively easy dungeon because I thought it was more important to improve our teamwork," I told them.

"…"

"The Fallen King's Tomb is a dungeon that dates back to the golden age of the Rohen Continent. Before us, a small team of archaeologists and a party of local adventurers entered this dungeon. Surprisingly, this dungeon was visited dozens of times before, and there was some research done along the way.

"They probably assumed that it had already been stabilized," I explained.

"…"

"This was before the players were summoned, but only three people made it out of this place alive. The records about the Fallen King's Tomb are based on personal essays documenting their experiences, research journals of archaeologists of the time, and historical records of the one called the Fallen King," I continued.

"…"

"What's interesting is how the survivors had described the danger that people must watch out for," I added.

"…"

"They said, 'Do not awaken the Fallen King.'"

"…"

"It's more of a theme. The goal of the Fallen King's Tomb isn't to hunt the Fallen King. The dungeon was designed in such a way that retrieving the king's treasure from the stone chamber is enough to clear the dungeon. The archaeologists who studied this place long ago assumed that the dungeon had already been stabilized, but…" I trailed off.

"They awakened the Fallen King," Nam Goong-Seon mumbled.

"That's right. Just like this," I said.

"What?"

— Peguereina tuto la gerepita atae.

I cast a quick spell and…

Boom! Boom!

The party members looked nervous.

After a brief pause, there was another series of rumblings.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

Somewhere, the deep growl of an unseen beast echoed throughout the air.

Boom! Boom! Boom!

There was a *screech*, and we could hear it getting closer and closer to us. Even though we couldn't see clearly in this dark space, everyone knew what exactly was happening; they weren't stupid, after all.

‘They’re running excitedly.’

“*Ah… huh?!*”

Lim Chae-Ryeong looked around nervously. I noticed No Dam-Hye and realized that she still had no idea what was going on, but the party wasn’t panicking yet.

Raymond Bolt smacked his shield and took a deep breath before standing up.

Just then, undead creatures in human form charged at us on all fours.

“…”

Jung Ha-Yan cast a spell, and their movements instantly slowed down.

As if time itself had slowed down, the undead creatures were moving in slow motion.

“I should probably start by covering the basics of our battle formation,” I said.

CHAPTER 1136
FALLEN KING'S TOMB (2)

"It'd be easier to understand if you think of it as the party being divided into two groups. Mr. Hyo-Yeol will be in party one, and the others will be in party two," I said.

"…"

"We have many tactical choices to choose from. There are many things I still need to explain, and besides the things I mentioned earlier, there are many important details I need to go over as well, but party two's tasks are really simple," I continued.

"…"

"The first task is to support party one," I said.

"What… what do we do? What do we do?!"

"*Ahhh!*"

"Push them back! Push them back!"

"Stop them! Don't let them through!"

'This is a total mess.'

The monsters had slowed down, but the party members were feeling so overwhelmed by the sudden turn of events that they had no idea what to do.

Of course, it was understandable. Grandpa Raymond Bolt was blocking the incoming undead creatures with his body, but there was only so much one vanguard could do.

I saw monsters being taken down, drenched in blood, but because the party lacked a proper formation, the monsters easily broke through them.

Lim Chae-Ryeong was fending off monsters by running around with her daggers, but it seemed like she couldn't stop the undead monster from getting close to Nam Goong-Seon.

Jung Ha-Yan was quietly maintaining her spell and holding her position, while No Dam-Hye was already hiding behind Grandpa Raymond Bolt. She wasn't fit for combat in the first place, so she was exempted.

"Do something! Damn it! You! What the hell are you doing?!" Lim Chae-Ryeong barked angrily at Woo Hyo-Yeol.

Woo Hyo-Yeol had his arms crossed and was doing nothing, so she was naturally upset. Obviously, Woo Hyo-Yeol ignored her words and instead looked around with a serious expression, but it wasn't because the party was a mess.

He probably had his doubts about the mage named Jung Ha-Yan.

Even in his first life, he had seen many skilled mages, but I was sure Jung Ha-Yan's abilities were shocking, even for him. He was probably wondering if Jung Ha-Yan's spell was even possible, but he wasn't a mage, so he couldn't reach a conclusion.

It wasn't just a simple debuff—the spell had actually slowed down the enemies' time upon entering the spell's zone. It was basically a type of debuff, but its effectiveness was almost unreal, considering Jung Ha-Yan was the only caster.

It was like she was freely manipulating the time within the spell's zone.

Including the undead, everything inside the zone had slowed down as well.

The fragmented flesh of the undead ghouls, the teeth of the undead that were knocked away upon getting hit by Grandpa Raymond Bolt's shield bash,

and even the arrows and spells fired by the skeleton archers and the skeleton mages.

They were being affected by that space, so of course, it was a shocking sight.

“Party two’s main role is to support party one, which is basically supporting Mr. Hyo-Yeol. All of you are in the same party, but you have to think of party one and party two as two separate parties.

“Of course, mobility and safety are the two most key factors for the vanguards of party two. Your main job is to ensure the safety of the rear guards and protect them from your designated positions,” I explained.

“…”

“Grandpa Raymond Bolt can provide long-range support, and Miss Chae-Ryeong can also provide some ranged support. *Ah!* Miss No Dam-Hye will be in the middle of the party. Unlike the typical triangular formation, Miss Lim Chae-Ryeong will stand behind Grandpa Bolt’s right foot,” I instructed.

“*Aaaaah!*”

‘They’re really fighting with everything they’ve got.’

Despite the chaos, it seemed like they were still listening to my instructions because I saw them making space.

Lim Chae-Ryeong wasn’t strong enough to fight these monsters in the first place, but I was sure she wouldn’t have chosen her class if she couldn’t fight enemies that were too slow.

‘Yeah, that’s the least you can do.’

“We’ll leave the left side open,” I told them.

“W-What do you mean?! What about Goong-Seon unni? What about her?!” Lim Chae-Ryeon shouted.

“Grandpa Bolt, you don’t need to keep holding off the monsters forever, either,” I instructed.

The monsters that broke past Raymond Bolt moved toward an empty space. Naturally, the monsters moved toward the left, and Nam Goong-Seon, who had never fought without a vanguard, turned pale, but she still chanted instinctively.

“Divine Blessing!” Nam Goong-Seon yelled.

While the monsters pounded against the holy protection spell, Jung Ha-Yan cast her spell, and a bolt of lightning crashed down, tearing through the horde of undead.

“*Ah!*”

Of course, it wasn’t over. Some of them were taken down, but like ravenous beasts, they quickly filled the empty spaces. While Nam Goong-Seon, who had already used her holy protection magic, was feeling shocked, Jung Ha-Yan’s spell blocked the enemies.

“Unless it’s a special case, it’s best to take turns casting spells. You understand what you need to do, right?” I asked.

“Vanish! You lost souls!”

Upon casting a Turn Undead-like spell, I heard a *crack*, and the undead creatures disintegrated. It was a classic mob-clearing tactic using a basic spell that every single priest out there was definitely capable of casting.

“Of course, we won’t use this formation in one-on-one battles, but for this party, I think it’s best if we maintain the current formation. *Ah!* Mr. Woo Hyo-Yeol, your position isn’t set, but I want you to move primarily on the left. You don’t need to stay with the rearguards. In fact, staying away from them is ideal,” I explained.

Woo Hyo-Yeol started swinging his sword while standing in the middle of the

monsters. He was fighting as if he were alone on a remote island. Of course, he wasn't stupid enough to have a hard time dealing with monsters suffering from a "debuff."

He dealt with the monsters on the far left, and Grandpa Bolt drove the monsters from the front to the left.

With that, the mindless undead creatures were lured exactly where we wanted them to go, and as for the ones trapped between the protection spell and Woo Hyo-Yeol, offensive spells rained down on them.

The occasional buff spell applied on Woo Hyo-Yeol was a bonus. If the members were more relaxed, they could even provide ranged support, but I was sure that he was experiencing a whole new world thanks to the support he was receiving right now.

'I'm sure he's feeling comfortable.'

It was all because he lacked nothing at the moment. Despite the fact that he was swinging his sword as usual, the monsters were marching straight to their deaths as if they were throwing themselves toward his sword.

Normally, this strategy involved two parties taking turns using protection spells, but if there was a member more capable than the party members, then there would be no reason not to use them.

Grandpa Bolt seemed to have finally understood how this worked, and he pushed the waves of monsters to the left. He also understood that he didn't need to follow Woo Hyo-Yeol just because the latter was moving around.

The slight adjustment in his stance was enough to maintain the overall formation. If Woo Hyo-Yeol represented the end of the clock's hand, then party two was the center of the clock's hand. They were in different positions, but they were basically moving together.

"What should I do?" No Dam-Hye asked.

‘Seriously… what are you supposed to do here? You’re still just a bard.’

“Just play some music,” I answered.

“*Ah…* okay,” No Dam-Hye said.

“Play something peaceful,” I added.

“Sure. I can do that,” No Dam-Hye said.

With No Dam-Hye playing peaceful music amidst the chaos, the party formation was finalized. It was actually kind of funny. Urgent cries and the shrill cries of the undead were everywhere, but there was peaceful music playing in the background.

“Grandpa,” I said.

The old man took out his crossbow upon seeing my signal, and he supported Woo Hyo-Yeol from the back.

“Miss Ha-Yan,” I said.

Ha-Yan instinctively knew what kind of spells she needed to cast without my instructions. Obviously, it didn’t take long for the undead to be defeated. It wasn’t that this was a difficult fight, but everyone looked at each other with satisfaction.

Of course, they had no time to take a break.

‘I wonder… if there’s going to be about three waves.’

“This time, how about we try it without the buffs?” I suggested.

The party members’ faces turned pale again.

“Over here! Unni!” Lim Chae-Ryeong shouted.

“*Kyaaaaah!*”

“Divine Blessing!” Nam Goong-Seon casted.

“Die, you disgusting pests!” she yelled.

“So w-what should I play next?” No Dam-Hye asked.

“This is tough… *haha*…” Raymond Bolt laughed.

“Gramps! They’re heading your way!” I shouted.

“…”

“You can apply more pressure. Are you okay, Mr. Woo Hyo-Yeol? Where are you—”

“I’m watching him, so don’t worry,” Nam Goong-Seon interrupted me.

“*Hyaaaaaaaaaah!”*

“…”

“…”

“…”

“I… I really can’t move anymore… Shit… I really can’t move an inch… Just kill me,” Lim Chae-Ryeong complained.

“*Pant… pant…”*

‘Not bad.’

In order to become closer to each other, it was good to fight together like this.

Before all this, they were extremely awkward with each other, but now, it felt like they had gotten a little closer. It was understandable, as they were watching each other’s backs, but Lim Chae-Ryeong was especially sociable.

‘She’s been talking to Grandpa Bolt.’

Even while talking to him, she was worried that there was going to be another battle.

‘How many hours have they been fighting for?’

Five hours?

This was the last planned monster wave.

‘Should I make them fight a little longer?’

I wanted to do that, but excessive greed was poisonous, and I was against pushing them beyond their physical and mental limits.

‘It’s not like they haven’t made any improvements.’

I couldn’t help but smile at the fact that they seemed to have adapted to the tactics and formation. Mastering the basics was the most important here. Even the most intricate commands and strategies were meaningless without a solid foundation.

I wasn’t exactly satisfied, but considering how much they had struggled against the debuffed undead, their performance was praiseworthy.

“We’ll camp here tonight,” I said.

Woo Hyo-Yeol started walking toward me.

He looked pretty satisfied. He wasn’t showing any expression, but the fact that he wasn’t picking a fight or complaining told me that he could see potential in this party.

There was no reason to pick a fight in the first place because he didn’t even feel out of place while working together with the party members.

“Not bad,” Woo Hyo-Yeol mumbled.

‘I knew this was going to happen.’

At least his Trust stat had increased by ten points.

“You think so?” I asked.

“…”

Obviously, I had to build my relationship with him. Clearing dungeons was important, but creating a bond with him was just as important. I had to build a foundation with him by sleeping, eating, fighting, celebrating, crying, and enjoying small events together.

“I’ll leave the cleanup to the rest of you. You as well, Mr. Woo Hyo-Yeol,” I said.

“…”

“We don’t need people to be on watch since Miss Ha-Yan can create a safe zone, but just to be safe, we’ll have two people pair up and keep watch,” I added.

“…”

“I’ll prepare the food. Since it’s been a tough day, we should have freshly cooked meals rather than just rations,” I suggested.

“…”

“Is there a dish you want to eat? *Ah!* I’ll be giving feedback on today’s battle while we eat, so I need all of you to attend,” I announced.

Naturally, I needed to open up first for other people to open up to me.

My energetic voice, happy face, and slightly excited expression implied that they were like family to me—no, not *like*, I already considered them my

family. In some ways, it was kind of strange. We had met recently, but I cared about them as if they were my family, which was something I couldn't understand as a twenty-year-old adult.

I couldn't come up with the answer myself, but…

If I had to give a reason despite not understanding it…

I'd say perhaps it was to fill the void in my heart due to my… forgotten memories… and the vague memories that I couldn't quite remember.

"That's enough cleanup. Come here and eat," I said to them.

Now that I thought about it, my smile looked somewhat sad.

CHAPTER 1137
FALLEN KING'S TOMB (3)

The party formation was nearly perfect, and I was not talking about levels or stats.

I was talking about the overall feeling of the party.

Nam Goong-Seon was kind and considerate of others, while Lim Chae-Ryeong was somewhat wild, making it kind of hard to predict her next move, but she was perceptive.

She also played the role of the mischievous youngest sibling in the party.

No Dam-Hye needed attention, but she knew how to stay in her position quietly. She knew how to set the atmosphere and play background music for the party.

As the oldest member, Raymond Bolt guided the younger party members well.

I didn't even need to mention my position in the party.

Jung Ha-Yan had a pretty good relationship with the Nam Goong-Chae-Ryeong duo.

Woo Hyo-Yeol had always been an outlier. He had always been an outsider who refused to have normal conversations with other people, but in any normal family, there was bound to be one misfit.

At least in this party, no one judged Woo Hyo-Yeol harshly or tried to change him.

They actually accepted him for who he was.

Lim Chae-Ryeong, the youngest and the mischievous member of the party, wouldn't stop chiding Woo Hyo-Yeol for acting tough earlier, and the sight made me feel happy.

"Why did you stand still earlier?! That was really dangerous!" Lim Chae-Ryeong complained.

'She must be talking about the incident earlier.'

When those monsters surrounded them, Woo Hyo-Yeol had his arms crossed and simply watched them from the sidelines.

I was sure Woo Hyo-Yeol's actions had made her feel annoyed.

"Hmph."

"Unni, did you see that just now?! Look at him! He just went '*hmph!'* Does being strong excuse him for his actions? I-It's my first time entering a dungeon, but I heard that one must cooperate with party members in a place like this!" Lim Chae-Ryeon exclaimed.

She wasn't too aggressive, and from Lim Chae-Ryeong's point of view, it was reasonable for her to complain like this. I didn't see the need to stop her because there wasn't a rule that said family members couldn't argue.

Actually, a good amount of conflict would help them think about each other more, and I was preparing a serious conflict with Woo Hyo-Yeol as well.

This amount of conflict was in an acceptable range because it was important to establish Woo Hyo-Yeol's position within the family.

He was reckless and couldn't blend well. Not only was he causing trouble every day, but he missed family meetings pretty often as well. However, in difficult situations, he was the most reliable person, and that was exactly his position in the family.

"There's no point in continuing this conversation," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“Conversation?! All you’ve been saying is *hmph!*” Lim Chae-Ryeong argued.

“Chae-Ryeong, that’s enough,” Nam Goong-Seon intervened.

“But… Goong-Seon unni… we need to talk about this. Miss Jung Ha-Yan, please say something,” she begged.

“O-O-Oppa d-didn’t tell me to. F-From his perspective…” Jung Ha-Yan trailed off.

“It’s exactly as the mage said. The party is just now coming together, so I was just standing by until Lee Ki-Young said something. I had no other intentions,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

‘Of course he won’t admit the fact that he was dumbfounded when he saw Ha-Yan spells.’

At this point, it was best to take Woo Hyo-Yeol’s side.

‘When playing tug-of-war, you have to give in at least once because that’s what makes it fun.’

“I won’t say that Mr. Woo Hyo-Yeol’s decision was wrong,” I said.

“*Ah!*”

Woo Hyo-Yeol didn’t show any reaction, but Lim Chae-Ryeong obviously looked upset.

The general consensus was that Woo Hyo-Yeol hadn’t done anything wrong, and since I had jumped in as the mediator and told everyone that his decision wasn’t wrong, it wasn’t strange for Lim Chae-Ryeon to feel angry.

Woo Hyo-Yeol hadn’t said anything or showed any reaction, but… he was probably enjoying the moment. Although he wasn’t showing it, I could tell that he had been annoyed earlier, but now, I could see a small smile tugging at his lips.

Normally, whenever Lim Chae-Ryeong talked to him, he would either have to avoid the conversation or simply walk away, but he couldn't do any of that.

Considering the situation, he probably allowed it to happen, but I was sure he wasn't welcoming it at all. Siding with him was a childish move, but Woo Hyo-Yeol had toddler-level communication skills, so I believed that this was a new experience for him.

'No matter how childish or trivial the arguments are, winning will always put anyone in a good mood.'

'Don't you agree, Hyo-Yeol?'

"But…!"

"I already told everyone that I was going to divide the party into two groups, right?" I reminded them.

"*Ugh…*"

"You're just running around recklessly without knowing your place," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"What did you say?! Are you done talking?!" Lim Chae-Ryeon shouted.

"*Hmph.*"

The "*hmph*" implied that he wanted to ignore her.

"Stop fighting, and let's eat. Giving feedback is good, but I think the atmosphere has gotten a bit tense. I understand your position as well, Miss Chae-Ryeong, but—"

"Right? Right? You understand me, right?" Lim Chae-Ryeong interrupted me.

"What did you say a moment ago?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked me.

'Look at him raising his eyebrow just because I'm not siding with him.'

"I'm just saying that I understand it from your perspective. I didn't mean anything else by it. More importantly, have some of this. It's going to get cold," I offered.

"I-I want to e-eat more, o-o-oppa," Jung Ha-Yan said.

"Sure, Miss Ha-Yan," I said.

While Lim Chae-Ryeong and Woo Hyo-Yeol were having their little episode, Jung Ha-Yan had already finished a bowl of stew.

'I'm sure it'll taste good.'

I didn't enjoy cooking, but I knew how to cook. Yul-Ha would always complain about my cooking, but I followed the exact measurements according to the recipe, so it'd taste okay, at the very least.

After being summoned to the continent, I didn't really have a lot of opportunities to cook, but I was still confident in my cooking.

"It's delicious," Raymond commented.

"Have some more, Grandpa," I offered.

"I would've helped if you had told me… It must've been difficult," Nam Goong-Seon said.

"It wasn't hard. I didn't really do much…" I said.

"Still, I didn't think you'd prepare this much during an expedition…" Nam Goong-Seon remarked.

"We'll be eating combat rations until we're sick of them… so I thought it'd be best to get the nutrients we need whenever we have the time," I told her.

'I can't serve combat rations to my family.'

The seven of us were eating while looking at each other, so there wasn't even a moment of silence.

"How did you come up with this formation?" Nam Goong-Seon asked.

"I just read strategy books at the academy…" I answered.

"*Ahh*. I've heard a lot about you, but seeing you in person…" Nam Goong-Seon paused.

'What? That I'm a genius? I know. You don't have to compliment me, Goong-Seon noona.'

I started messing with the campfire.

"But Grandpa Bolt—*Ah!* Please speak comfortably," Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

"I'll do that," Raymond said.

Lim Chae-Ryeong cast her friendly skill on Grandpa Raymond.

"S-S-So…"

"The wedding march? That's random," No Dam-Hye said.

"L-Later," Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

"*Ah…* okay…"

Jung Ha-Yan was talking to No Dam-Hye, and they talked about more topics as time passed. Whenever the topic changed, the number of people joining the conversation would change as well.

Whenever Raymond Bolt asked No Dam-Hye and Nam Goong-Seon a question, Jung Ha-Yan and Lim Chae-Ryeong would whisper to each other.

It was like we were in the middle of a freshman orientation or in the middle of a drinking night, as no one was talking about anything important. There was also no need to talk about anything serious.

Just talking about everyday life was enough for people to grow closer to each other.

'But he's staying quiet and trying to act cool in the corner.'

Woo Hyo-Yeol looked kind of uncomfortable, but the fact that he was here was important. That was enough to make them feel like a party.

"Why are you standing around like that?" Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

'No, Chae-Ryeong. Don't be so direct with him… '

"I'm going to scout the area," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

'Or else he's going to run away.'

"You don't need to do that, Mr. Woo Hyo-Yeol. We have a safe zone, and standing watch should be enough," I told him.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young said that you don't need to do that. Stop standing there and let's talk. I want to know what you did on Earth… Did you learn how to wield a sword while you were on Earth?

"You didn't receive military training back on Earth, did you? I feel like you were alone on Earth as well… You didn't have any friends, right?" Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

'No, don't try to get close to him.'

"Your questions are not worth answering," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

Just as I expected, Woo Hyo-Yeol's patience was running low, and he seemed like he was ready to run out of this place at any moment.

And that was when Lim Chae-Ryeong said, “I was alone.”

Woo Hyo-Yeol’s steps came to a halt, and I felt like I was looking at a stranger.

Lim Chae-Ryeong had spoken indifferently as if it wasn’t a big deal to make it sound more realistic. Lim Chae-Ryeong had described what she was like in the past, but she didn’t seem to care that she used to be alone.

“…”

It wasn’t like I intentionally gathered people with tragic pasts, but they all had one.

“I was alone even after arriving here, but when I met Goong-Seon unni—”

“Do I need to hear more?” Woo Hyo-Yeol interrupted her.

“*Ugh!* I’m trying to be serious here! Why would you talk to me like that?” Lim Chae-Ryeong complained.

“…”

“I-I’m trying to say that I’m sorry,” Lim Chae-Ryeong added.

“…”

“I-I think I overreacted a bit just now. I’m sure you have your own plans…” Lim Chae-Ryeong added.

“I accept your apology, so get out of my sight,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“*Ugggh!* What’s with that attitude?! If I apologize, then shouldn’t you at least try to pretend to apologize as well? What the hell is wrong with him?!” Lim Chae-Ryeong yelled.

“*Whoo…*”

“*Ack!* I’m mad! *Ah!* I’m angry!” Lim Chae-Ryeong yelled.

'Good job. You're doing great!'

The Level 2 rogue[1] wasn't even expecting to melt Woo Hyo-Yeol's cold heart, but their conversation wasn't going anywhere.

Although this wasn't the best way to describe it, useless input had value.

"Fine! You win. You're the star in the sky, while I'm a pebble stuck on the ground, so t-teach me how to fight!" Lim Chae-Ryeong requested.

'That was random.'

"I don't want to," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"*Ack!* Man!" Lim Chae-Ryeong shouted.

"I have never taught anyone how to fight, and if I taught you how to fight, I don't think you'll get any better," Woo Hyo-Yeol told her.

"I-I know that as well, but…" Lim Chae-Ryeong paused.

"But…" Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"Yes?"

"I can at least spar with you. I have one condition, though."

"…"

"If you stop chattering, I'll consider sparring with you," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"Are you serious?!" she yelled.

"…"

"Just you wait. I'll make sure to land a hit on you!" Lim Chae-Ryeong said confidently.

“How ridiculous,” Woo Hyo-Yeol commented.

‘This is kind of surprising.

I wasn’t sure if his goal was to make Lim Chae-Ryeong shut her mouth or if he could see potential in this party, but it was encouraging to see him agree to spar with her.

‘What if he’s agreeing to spar just so he could beat her up?’

I thought that way, but I believed that he wouldn’t beat her up out of malice.

After our meal, I actually saw them spar in an empty clearing, and the sight made me rub my eyes in disbelief.

“*Kyaaah!*”

“You’re slow, and your posture is bad,” Woo Hyo-Yeol commented.

“*Ugh!*”

“Your breathing and the way you’re wielding your daggers are wrong,” Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

“*Hyaaaah!*”

“The way you’re moving your body is really disgraceful,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“*Yaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!*”

‘Did he want to beat her up using his words?’

The spar didn’t last long.

“I’ll hit you one day!” Lim Chae-Ryeong shouted.

“If you manage to do that, I’ll grant you one wish,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"*Pant… pant…* that's a promise," Lim Chae-Ryeong remarked.

I couldn't believe how much she improved in that short period of time.

I thought the difficulty was lower than I expected, but he was…

'A lot easier to get along with than I thought.'

I thought I had chained him up pretty tightly, but the lock had to have gotten loose, or perhaps it was easier for him to open up because I had unlocked the lock on him.

Obviously, I had no choice but to think he needed counseling.

Perhaps while we were on watch together and sitting by the campfire…

"…"

"…"

A few hours later…

"*Ugh… uh…* O-Oppa… no. No… not there… *ah*… yes… yes… yes…" Jung Ha-Yan mumbled.

"…"

"*Ah*… *eek… eeek… hehehe… hehehehe…*" Jung Ha-Yan giggled.

I had no idea when she walked into my tent, but after moving away Jung Ha-Yan's arm, I left the tent and saw Woo Hyo-Yeol sitting by the fire.

"Looks like I'm late. I'm sorry," I apologized.

"I can stand watch by myself," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"No, it should be done in pairs…" I said.

'He's not even looking at me.'

The fire crackled, shattering the silence.

Woo Hyo-Yeol, who was looking at the fire as if he was deep in his thoughts, looked as if he was telling me to stop bothering him.

However, I had to say something because I had taken this shift for myself to talk to him.

"How were things today? What do you think about the party?" I asked.

"They were a mess," Woo Hyo-Yeol answered.

'This jerk.'

"*Cough! Cough! Cough!*"

"…"

"*Cough… cough!*"

Before he could say anything, I quickly hid the blood that was on my right hand.

"T-The air… feels kind of cold," I stuttered.

However, Woo Hyo-Yeol was already focused on my bloody right hand.

'Just coughing makes me spit out blood now.'

"*Cough! Cough! Cough! Ugh… ha…*"

---

1. rogue from now on ☜

CHAPTER 1138
FALLEN KING'S TOMB (4)

Naturally, I had to quickly turn away because I didn't want to show any signs of weakness. This wasn't the reason I was here.

Woo Hyo-Yeol knew that my time was limited. He knew that I only had two to three years left, but just because he knew that didn't mean that I would show him my weakness.

I was using my terminal illness as a weapon.

I told Woo Hyo-Yeol about my remaining time not because I wanted him to pity me or because I wanted special treatment from him. It was a promise and a contract of sorts. It was my way of promising him that I would live each day to the fullest and would never waste even a single moment.

It was both a warning and a display of determination.

I didn't know what Woo Hyo-Yeol thought about it, but I believed that by telling him my secret that I had been keeping to myself, I had formed an unspoken agreement with him.

I was thinking that I was negotiating with him using my limited time remaining as a weapon, which was why I couldn't show him my weakness because my terminal illness was a strength, not a weakness.

'Since I'm short on time, I need to cut this short.'

Originally, I had two to three years left, but my lore had changed thanks to Kim Hyun-Sung's arrival. I had about a year and a half left. It was probably even shorter than that.

On the outside, my declining lifespan was due to me overworking myself, but

the truth was that I was determined to spend each day to the fullest rather than wasting time.

I stopped coughing as if it was nothing serious and looked back at Woo Hyo-Yeol.

Perhaps it was because of the flickering flames, but it seemed like his eyes were shaking, but he showed no other reactions. He glanced at the bloodstains on the palm of my hand and immediately looked back at the flickering flames as if he didn't want me to think that he was worried about me.

"You…" Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"Yes?"

"…"

"…Never mind. It's nothing," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

'Tsk, how anticlimactic.'

"More importantly, what were you saying earlier?" I asked.

"…"

"I think I asked what you thought of the party. Didn't you give me an answer?"

"…"

Woo Hyo-Yeol frowned before saying, "As I said, they didn't seem that bad."

"What?"

"Weren't you talking about the party?" Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

"Oh… yes, I was," I answered.

“I wouldn’t say I’m satisfied, but it would be more accurate to say I can see their potential. Of course, minus that reckless idiot,” Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

“You say that, but you put in a lot of effort into training her,” I commented.

“It was just to shut her up, and to be exact, I wouldn’t call it training because she’s the only one who benefited from it,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“But…”

“I don’t know what it is you want me to say, but that’s my honest opinion. The majority of them aren’t good at the basics, but I can see what kind of party you’re trying to create. Don’t misunderstand, though. I’m not saying that I’m going to keep this party together forever,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

‘Come on, I know you like them.’

When excluding all the other factors and looking at only efficiency, working as a party was undeniably more efficient than working alone. I still didn’t know the reason he failed in his first life, but I was sure his stubbornness was one of the reasons for his failure.

Even Kim Hyun-Sung had limitations on what he could do alone.

It was no coincidence that he had chosen to descend on the Rohen Continent with the members of the Blue Guild.

I was sure he had realized that others could cover the parts he was lacking and offer insight into things he couldn’t see, and it had to be an eye-opening experience for Woo Hyo-Yeol.

‘It was pretty comfortable, wasn’t it?’

“I’m glad you think so. At least that means they didn’t get in your way…” I said.

“There’s no need to be modest,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“What?” I asked.

“I hate to admit it, but you’re competent,” Woo Hyo-Yeol answered.

“…”

“I understand why they’re calling you a genius,” Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

‘Wow, he’s actually complimenting me.’

And that was when he said something unexpected…

“How much time do you have left?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

Despite the fact that he had already asked the question, he seemed to be regretting it.

He looked like he had asked something unnecessary.

“I already told you,” I answered.

“How absurd. You really think you can fool my eyes?” Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

“…”

“…”

“I honestly don’t know,” I told him.

“I’ll be straightforward,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“What?”

“Whether you die tomorrow or the day after, it will have nothing to do with me. How much time you have left has nothing to do with me. At least, that’s how I used to feel. Now that we’re in the same boat, though, things are going to become complicated if you end up dying just like that,” Woo Hyo-Yeol

explained.

'You… '

"I don't know what kind of contract the GENIUSES have decided to offer you, but I've already changed many of my plans because of your ridiculous persuasion," Woo Hyo-Yeol continued.

"I'm sorry about that, but…"

"What I'm trying to say is that if you're going to die… die after you've completed everything," Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

'He's such a big asshole.'

Whether he meant it or not, his words could be considered encouragement. It was just a matter of interpretation. Of course, being an optimist, I interpreted his grumbling as encouragement.

Perhaps it was just my imagination, but it felt like he was telling me not to die so easily.

"You don't have to worry. I'll complete everything I need to do before I die, even if you don't tell me," I told him.

"*Hmph.*"

"You're the one who shouldn't be making a fool of yourself. I'll pave a way so radiant that it'll leave you speechless," I added.

There was some weight behind my words. It was part rivalry, part camaraderie.

Although I grumbled as if I were in a bad mood, there was a faint smile on my face. It felt like the two people who wouldn't acknowledge each other were starting to open up to each other. Even I thought that perhaps it was too soon, but Woo Hyo-Yeol and I were beginning to acknowledge each other.

‘I swear… you’re smiling a little, too, aren’t you?’

“Just wait and see,” I told him.

‘Come on, I know you want to smile too. It’s a beautiful rivalry, isn’t it? Isn’t this the moment when we’re finally acknowledging each other? I’m not the only one who thought that way, right?’

“*Hmph.*”

I looked at Woo Hyo-Yeol nervously, and perhaps because it was early in the morning, but I could see the corner of his lips slightly going up.

‘Yeah, that’s what I’m talking about.’

“I’ll be watching,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

I wasn’t sure how deep our bond was, but I was sure that it was getting deeper.

‘This is why private counseling is important.’

It felt like a fresh start, and it was like we had another goal.

I got the feeling that both Woo Hyo-Yeol and I were starting to work even harder.

I had always been a hard worker, but he seemed a little more motivated than before, even though this dungeon raid was meaningless in his eyes. People unfamiliar with him wouldn’t notice the change, but I could see it clearly.

Afterward, he started talking a little more.

“It looks like you’re not taking advantage of your talents, you troublemaker. Your role isn’t to fight the monsters head-on,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“What are you talking about?!” Lim Chae-Ryeong shouted.

“*Whoo…*”

“What is it?! You need to explain better so that I can understand,” Lim Chae-Ryeong exclaimed.

He would talk to Lim Chae-Ryeong during a hunt or training.

“The Fallen King’s Tomb is just a Level 3 dungeon. Even if the undead monsters are equipped with weapons from the Golden Civilization era, it doesn’t change the fact that this is still a Level 3 dungeon,” Woo Hyo-Yeol explained.

“…”

“Pathetic,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

Naturally, the silence lasted longer.

As usual, I was the one leading the expedition, but Woo Hyo-Yeol would join the conversation and speak more frequently. He seemed pretty engaged when we were testing out a new formation, and I was surprised when he started commenting on the party members’ equipment.

Just like now…

“It’s too weak.”

“Are you going to nag again?” Lim Chae-Ryeong complained.

“I’m saying that your equipment is too weak. There’s no rule saying that rogues can’t equip shields.

“Especially for someone as inexperienced as you, a small shield might actually be good for you. And you, the priest, the same goes for you,” Woo Hyo-Yeol explained.

“Me?”

“Nam Goong-whatever-your-name-is. Yeah, you. You should also consider equipping a shield. The mage over there is fine without it, but your spell-casting speed is too slow.

“If you enter a Level 4 dungeon, you won’t be able to cast your spells properly. If you make a mistake, you’re the one who’s going to die,” Woo Hyo-Yeol warned.

“…”

“You should at least prepare a way to defend yourself,” Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

“Thanks… for the advice,” Nam Goong-Seon mumbled.

“I only said it because I simply couldn’t ignore it,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

Regardless of his intentions, it was clear that Woo Hyo-Yeol was interested in turning this party into a proper party.

“*Ugh…* do you agree, Mr. Lee Ki-Young?” Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

“Yes. I actually heard that rearguards are starting to equip basic defensive equipment these days as part of a growing trend. This applies to you, Miss Lim Chae-Ryeong, since you fight as a vanguard.

“Later on, once your level increases, you might not need the basic defensive equipment at all, but for now, having one will definitely help,” I answered.

“But still, a rogue with a shield? *Ugh…”* Lim Chae-Ryeong grumbled.

“A small, palm-sized shield should be enough to start with,” I recommended.

“Well, if it’s that small…” Lim Chae-Ryeong mumbled.

“How about we test it in the next stone chamber? Mr. Woo Hyo-Yeol will not be attending,” I informed them.

“Whaaat? But isn’t the next one the first boss room?” Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

“I told you that this was just a Level 3 dungeon, troublemaker. You’re not fighting a dungeon master but a mini boss in the dungeon, so if you’re afraid of that…” Woo Hyo-Yeol trailed off.

“Who said I’m scared?! I’m only Level 2, so I’m wondering if it’s even possible,” Lim Chae-Ryeong argued.

“Did you forget who the party’s vanguard is?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

Lim Chae-Ryeong quietly looked at Raymond Bolt—a Level 4 warrior and a veteran who had survived countless life-or-death battles.

Although he was no longer on the front lines due to his advanced age, his experience and his title as a Level 4 warrior still made him powerful.

He had a massive physique, sculpted by decades of rigorous strength training. Despite being equipped with heavy armor, a large crossbow, and an even larger shield, he showed no signs of fatigue.

He looked as if he were wearing everyday clothes.

I was sure Woo Hyo-Yeol had already realized it. He had to have realized that I hadn’t brought Raymond Bolt here because he was the senior member of the party. Actually, anyone with eyes would be able to see that.

‘A pretty experienced veteran among veterans.’

He was a bit smaller, but he was a perfectly balanced tank.

His high sense of strategy was something even I couldn’t help but acknowledge.

“I’ll leave it to you, Grandpa,” I said.

“Hahaha,” Raymond laughed.

“…”

“Haha… well then, let’s see if I still got it,” Raymond said.

[You have encountered the king’s knight, Hartel Herich, the first boss of the Fallen King’s Tomb.]

A giant bolt from a massive crossbow was shot, signaling the start of the battle. It struck the knight’s shoulder plate, and a *crack* echoed as the javelin shattered it, piercing the knight.

CHAPTER 1139
FALLEN KING'S TOMB (5)

'It's definitely old school.'

In other words, it felt a bit outdated. Colonel Smith from the neighboring continent, for example, was capable of firing magical bullets from his fingertips, so compared to that, loading a massive crossbow one shot at a time was really dated.

If he had incorporated Rohen's engineering technology or had the help of a player with a production-related job, it would have looked a bit more stylish, but it seemed like the old man wasn't interested in that.

Of course, from Raymond Bolt's perspective, it was probably unavoidable. If various features were added to his crossbow, it could malfunction in different ways, and that would be another thing he would have to worry about.

Rather than not being able to use it when he needed to use it, he probably decided that it was better to have something he could use, even if it was a bit inconvenient to use.

'It's probably also easier to infuse mana into each shot.'

I considered modifying it for him a little, but I didn't see the need to force him to use a different method to fight, as the result I was seeing wasn't so bad.

The first named enemy in the tomb, the King's Knight or something, was a typical undead knight that often appeared in low-level dungeons.

The knight was dressed in pitch-black armor with a massive greatsword in

hand. It was the perfect opponent for party two's debut, and Grandpa Raymond looked like he was having a lot more fun than I expected.

Clunk.

Swoosh! Boom!

A massive javelin imbued with mana was fired from the crossbow.

The fact that he infused mana only into the arrowhead told me that he had a deep understanding of his abilities. Since the amount of energy he could use was limited, he was using his mana cost-effectively. The attack wasn't powerful enough to deal a fatal blow, but it was more than enough to disrupt the first boss's movements.

"*Uh…*"

"Don't put your guard down… and let's try moving together," Raymond suggested.

"*Ah*… okay, Grandfather."

Since Noh Dam-Hye was just a bard, the Nam Goong-Chae-Ryeong duo and Grandpa Bolt had to take care of the named monster.

Lim Chae-Ryeong still looked a bit flustered, but she quickly regained composure, and it was all because Grandpa Bolt was leading them calmly.

He calmly blocked the oncoming sword attack with his sword, and among the second weapons he had, he had chosen a mace. He probably thought that using a one-handed sword wouldn't be enough to cut through the knight's armor.

As someone who thought that carrying around a bunch of weapons was useless, I agreed with his decision. I had seen plenty of people slicing through armor, but not every adventurer had the same level of skill as those people.

‘He’s composed.’

I felt it during our first group hunt, but his defensive skill was something straight out of a textbook. I even considered having him tutor Park Deok-Gu.

‘That pig needs to learn from him. He’s just all brawn.’

When I saw him move with maximum efficiency in mind in relation to his Strength, Endurance, and mana, I couldn’t help but compare him to our pig.

His movements weren’t just muscle memory due to his years of experience; he was constantly thinking and adjusting his strategy as a tank.

It was really impressive how he made space for Lim Chae-Ryeong, allowing her to move around freely. Of course, Park Deok-Gu wasn’t bad either because his teamwork with Kim Ye-Ri was already at a high level.

However, I couldn’t help but question whether he could still show the same level of teamwork with a partner who wasn’t Kim Ye-Ri.

‘Sure, the pig was stronger, but… ‘

Raymond Bolt was showing exactly what it meant to be a veteran. He was guiding the novice rogue with precision and efficiency, allowing Lim Chae-Ryeong to enjoy herself as well. She moved swiftly with her dagger to constantly harass the undead knight.

— For the Fallen King… The Fallen…

The undead knight slammed its sword into the ground.

‘Looks like the pattern has changed.’

Grandpa Bolt grabbed Lim Chae-Ryeong’s collar to stop her, and then he pulled her behind him. Then, Nam Goong-Seon cast a spell as if she had been waiting for it.

Crackle, crackle, crackle1

The wave of energy from the undead knight's sword collided with Nam Goong-Seon's barrier.

The Divine Blessing shattered into pieces, but the remaining wave of energy wasn't dangerous enough to be a real threat to those three. Grandpa Bolt had to be thinking the same thing as me, as he used his shield and body to block the black wave.

"Grandpa Bolt!" Lim Chae-Ryeong shouted.

"Don't worry about me," Raymond reassured.

"*Ah…*"

— For the… Fallen King… for him…

"Holy weapon!" Raymond shouted.

Soon, holy magic illuminated the old man's mace. The undead knight's helmet, which was on the verge of breaking due to the continuous attacks, shattered as soon as the glowing mace made contact with it.

Boom!

"Nice!"

"…"

After confirming that the undead knight's armor was finally destroyed, Raymond swapped back to a one-handed sword and decapitated the knight to finish the job.

— Save… him…

The undead knight muttered its final words.

Lim Chae-Ryeong grabbed Nam Goong-Seon's hand and excitedly jumped around.

"We did it, unni!" Lim Chae-Ryeong said excitedly.

'Even though you didn't really do much.'

"Grandpa, you're really strong. I knew you were Level 4, but I didn't know you were *this* strong. Seriously…" Lim Chae-Ryeong complimented him.

"*Hahaha,* I'm not that strong." Raymond laughed.

"What? What are you saying? You basically did everything. That undead knight didn't stand a chance against you," Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

"Without all of you, I wouldn't have been able to pull it off. Goong-Seon was the one who blocked the knight's attack, and… Chae-Ryeong, you're the one who kept the knight under constant pressure. My strength and mana alone wouldn't have been enough to deal a critical blow to it," Raymond said.

"Then how… did you—"

"That's what you call experience," Woo Hyo-Yeol said, interrupting from the sidelines. "Unlike you, that old man is a real warrior, troublemaker. You need to learn that outcomes can change depending on how you use your limited resources. Being low level or having low stats isn't an excuse."

"…"

"Once the battle starts, you need to figure out what you can do no matter the situation. Obviously, obtaining his level of experience in a short time isn't easy, but no matter the method, you must have a backup plan. That's how you stay competitive," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"T-Then how do I get stronger…" she asked.

"There are many ways to become even stronger. You can change your job by

being chosen by GENIUS, change your equipment, or… train yourself to death.

“Your question is pretty ridiculous… Do I really need to tell you the answer to everything?” Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

“No, but…”

“You’re getting more than you deserve, so it’s up to you to figure out what you can do to make yourself useful,” Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

The conversation was pretty long, but it finally ended with a piece of advice. He leaned on the wall with his arms crossed again as if he wasn’t interested in what was going on.

Lim Chae-Ryeong seemed to have felt something, as she seemed slightly anxious. I was cautious because I thought he was being kind of harsh to a beginner who had just entered a dungeon.

“To become stronger, the most important thing is…” Grandpa Bolt chimed in.

“Yes, Grandpa…” Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

“…”

“…”

“…keeping your resolve no matter the situation,” he continued.

“…”

“…”

“*Ah!*”

“That’s so heartwarming, Grandpa.”

“…”

“Th-Thank you, Grandpa,” Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

I noticed Woo Hyo-Yeol’s unhappy face, but he refrained from saying anything because Raymond wasn’t exactly wrong.

‘Hyo-Yeol, you should listen to him. He’s saying useful things.’

Mental power was difficult to quantify as stats. Depending on one’s mindset, one could defeat unbeatable opponents and exert strength beyond one’s existing stats.

‘That’s why it’s important to take care of the party members’ mental health.’

The most challenging dungeons had psychic-type monsters as well.

Even Epic and Legendary adventurers could fail to clear dungeons, and as far as I could remember, the majority of those failures were due to psychic-type monsters acting as the boss monsters.

I was talking about dungeons similar to the Cursed Shrine, where Juliena was the boss monster.

Compared to the Cursed Shrine, the Fallen King’s Tomb was really easy.

The boss had mechanics, so if the party members’ levels were high, the boss wouldn’t be that big of a threat. In addition, there was also a strategy to deal with the boss’s mechanics because Level 3 dungeons were just Rare dungeons on our continent.

“By the way… did anyone hear what that Undead Knight said just now? They mentioned the Fallen King…” Nam Goong-Seon asked.

“It’s probably a strategy to clear this dungeon,” I answered.

“So you thought that as well,” Nam Goong-Seon said.

‘Is there really a need to think about that? It’s pretty obvious.’

“As its name suggests, the Fallen King’s Tomb was created for the Fallen King. Most of the monsters here are those who used to serve the Fallen King, and the named monster you defeated just now was also a knight who once served the Fallen King,” I explained.

“*Ah.*”

“I don’t know why this place became a dungeon, but I don’t think it was because of a curse or lingering resentment. There’s impure mana here, but I don’t sense any lingering grudges.

“The monsters also don’t show any signs of uncontrollable frenzy,” I continued.

“I see.”

“They rose again because of the Fallen King… and I’m sure they want to rest again. When the knight asked us to save the Fallen King, they were probably asking us to help the king fall into eternal sleep again.

“I’m assuming the condition for clearing the dungeon lies somewhere here,” I said.

“How were you able to figure out that much?” Nam Goong-Seon asked.

‘The designs of low-level dungeons like these are pretty typical.’

Unlike Juliena, the dungeon master wasn’t a lunatic. Otherwise, we would have had a hard time breathing at the entrance of the dungeon. We would have been hearing and seeing things, and mobs would have been saying some pretty ridiculous things.

Considering the fact that a priest’s purification spell couldn’t purify everything, the Fallen King’s Tomb was pretty boring and peaceful. Obviously, since the difficulty wasn’t high, hints were hidden all over the dungeon.

“I-I-I think oppa is right. I-It’s… written right here. It was in the armory storage over there. It’s the personal journal of Hartel Herich,” Jung Ha-Yan chimed in.

‘Hints like this.’

“What does it say, Miss Jung Ha-Yan?” Nam Goong-Seon asked.

“After the Fallen King was buried in his tomb… his servants spent their time here. I-I don’t think they were locked up in here… I think they chose to live here, and they traveled back and forth to the surface… also…” Jung Ha-Yan trailed off.

“…”

“I-It talks about how great of a ruler he was,” Jung Ha-Yan added.

I was sure it was a text filled with admiration, and it was probably filled with lots of keys that’d help us unlock locks. It probably had things like patterns or murals drawn on walls. It was difficult to see because time had eroded it, but a skilled linguist or cryptographer would have no problems interpreting it.

Mages specializing in dungeon exploration often had a background in archaeology, so there were numerous ways to clear the dungeon.

“Despite his nickname… many people were loyal to him,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“That’s right. From this moment on, we’re going to fulfill their wishes,” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“What?”

I ignored Nam Goong-Seon’s confused face and stepped forward, saying, “Rohen’s descendants are here to cleanse the tarnished name of the Fallen King!”

“Just now…”

“Hear me, loyal friends and subjects of the Fallen King! Rohen’s descendants are here! They are here to restore his sullied name!” I continued.

— Open…

“*Huh?*”

— Open… the path.

“…”

— Open the path… and greet Rohen’s descendants.

“…”

— For Rohen’s descendants. Rohen’s descendants… are finally… at the king’s tomb.

The party members looked at me with confusion.

‘I’m not even surprised.’

There were usually many alternative ways to clear a dungeon.

I was sure the same was true for the Demon King of Sunset’s Castle.

‘We need to figure that out first.’

— Rohen’s descendants… have finally… stepped foot into the king’s tomb!

CHAPTER 1140
FALLEN KING'S TOMB (6)

Boom! Boom! Boom!

The torches that hadn't been lit for a long time were ignited, and I saw undead creatures aiming their spears at Rohen's descendants.

The flickering blue lights along the walls illuminated the undead, creating an eerie scene, but the glow in their eyes didn't feel menacing at all. Instead, their eyes shone with respect.

They weren't like Bahamut, who had been waiting for the Priest of Prophecy for a long time, but it was undeniable that they had been waiting a long time as well. Reflecting their long wait, the king's attendants carried themselves with the utmost courtesy.

— Open the path…

"…"

— Open the path… for Rohen's descendants.

"…"

— Rohen's descendants have arrived.

To make things worse, the named monster that spawned looked ridiculous. The undead creature dressed as a mage was known as the Royal Archmage, Chain Burning.

Perel Desire, the Fallen Queen, loved the Fallen King so much that she wished to be buried by his side. Alongside her, key named monsters were lining up to greet Rohen's descendants.

“What’s… going on, Mr. Lee Ki-Young…” Nam Goong-Seon asked.

“We’re clearing the dungeon,” I answered.

“Th-That’s not what I was asking, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. I know I haven’t been an adventurer for a long time… but this… I have never heard of this at all. How is this even possible? How…” Nam Goong-Seon questioned.

‘Of course you haven’t seen this before.’

Surprisingly, dungeon logs or even adventurer logs were rare in Rohen. I was surprised that even these uncultured people had kept records, but of course, their situation was different from ours.

We encouraged adventurers to read publicly accessible logs in an institutionalized archival system, but these guys never really considered adventure logs as important.

Adventure logs were rare, and the documentation methods were far from sophisticated.

Thus, the continent hadn’t been able to advance, and the people of Rohen didn’t really understand how dungeons worked.

“Dungeons aren’t hunting grounds,” I said.

“What? What do you mean? Nam Goong-Seon asked.

“It’s just like I said. This isn’t a place to hunt mobs and boss monsters,” I answered.

Nam Goong-Chae-Ryeong duo and old man Raymond Bolt were looking at me. Woo Hyo-Yeol followed the undead creatures while pretending to be uninterested, but he was probably listening in.

“Dungeons are usually created in places with rich lore, including myths, legends, and histories of Rohen. The same thing applies to this Fallen King’s

Tomb. The Fallen King of the Golden Civilization era was an actual historical event in Rohen," I explained.

'From the creator's point of view, minimizing production cost is essential.'

Rather than creating a dungeon by writing a new story, it was a lot cheaper to use an existing story.

"…"

"I think clearing the dungeon means solving the problem tied to the story I told you earlier. Of course, hunting monsters is part of the process of solving problems, but… I won't consider that as the right way of solving the problem," I said.

"I-I see."

"I'm not saying that all dungeons have other ways of clearing them, but… at the very least, there's a story left to tell in the Fallen King's Tomb," I added.

"Even if that's true… I never imagined something like this would happen. I understand what you're saying, but… I just can't believe what I'm seeing," Nam Goong-Seon said.

'Yeah, there's a difference seeing it from a creator's point of view and a player's point of view.'

Without the aid of dungeon raid specialists or dungeon raid support teams, the most they could do was analyze monster patterns, guess the monster type, and estimate the number of named beings.

A more experienced party would go further than that and use the item hidden in the dungeon by throwing it at the boss. No matter how competent a party was, their perspective was bound to differ from a creator who had to think about external factors as well.

'If this were a Level 5 or higher dungeon, this wouldn't end so easily.'

There would probably be a variety of monsters, and the named entities would have more character. Unfortunately, too much time had passed, and their memories had deteriorated to the point that the dungeon could no longer be a high-ranking dungeon.

Like the Mole Saint's dungeon, this story wasn't really a significant part of the continent's main lore, which meant that it wasn't worth the investment.

"Then the mainstream event that's taking place right now… is that related to a lore that already existed in the Rohen Continent?" Nam Goong-Seon asked.

'Why are you asking me that?'

"That's highly likely to be the case. Since it's a dungeon that was chosen as a mainstream event, there's a strong chance that an undiscovered story runs through the heart of Rohen. It could be an old tale that was never written down," I replied.

"This brings somewhat of a new perspective to the table. Seeing dungeons as a place for solving problems… Come to think of it, I recall reading a paper discussing something similar. It's likely a legend that was never written in old texts," Nam Goong-Seon said.

'Looks like there were some attempts to move forward.'

Of course, they weren't going to accept it so easily.

Rather than investing time and money on unattainable goals, they were obviously more invested in survival and stats.

Raymond Bolt joined the conversation by nodding.

Just then, I heard Lim Chae-Ryeong mumble something to Woo Hyo-Yeol.

"Isn't he amazing? Mr Lee Ki-Young seems incredibly smart."

"If he doesn't do at least that much, there's no point in having him with us,"

Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“Hey, be nice. *Geez*, you’re a really strange one,” Lim Chae-Ryeong complained.

“*Hmph,* you’re one to talk. You should worry about improving your skills rather than admiring others,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“*Ugh*… just you wait,” Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

“You’re going to land a hit on me one day? Is that what you were going to say?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“You’re so annoying,” Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

“*Hmph.”*

The party continued walking through the tomb while having various conversations. The undead creatures that had charged at us a moment ago with the intention to kill were now on their knees while muttering something.

— The Fallen King…

— Fal… len… king…

— For the Fallen King…

I couldn’t help but think that we were getting closer to the Fallen King.

After passing through a narrow path, I saw a pretty open area.

Intricate patterns and tattered banners, weathered by time, surrounded the firmly sealed door.

The Fallen King was beyond that door, or at least that was what the surroundings suggested. Just as I expected, towering guards blocked our

path. The surprised party members stared at me as if asking me what we were supposed to do, but it was obvious.

“Grandpa,” I said.

“*Ahem.*”

Old man Raymond Bolt seemed dissatisfied, but he still handed our weapons to the undead creatures.

Everyone looked nervous upon seeing that.

“D-Do we really need to give it to them?” Nam Goong-Seon asked.

“We’re going to meet their king. We should at least show him some respect,” I said.

“I-It’s making me nervous…” Nam Goong-Seon remarked.

‘These people are really… ‘

Clanking noises echoed from the towering guards as they retrieved our weapons.

Once we no longer had our weapons, the closed doors finally opened.

— We greet… the king.

— We greet the king.

— We…

I saw a disgusting undead sitting on a massive chair.

The king still had his skeletal frame, but a transparent and blue light outlined the figure he once had.

He was an old man who seemed to be in the same age range as Raymond

Bolt. He was wearing a long, spiky crown, and he wasn't wearing any armor. What caught my attention more than that old ghost's appearance were the rewards waiting in the king's stone chamber.

'Is he going to give all of that to us?'

"We greet the Fallen King," I greeted.

"W-We greet the Fallen… King."

Woo Hyo-Yeol didn't care about the king and kept his head up.

I was kind of worried that the king would overreact and accuse Woo Hyo-Yeol of being disrespectful, but the Fallen King's vengeful spirit seemed to be not that high-level. He gave the impression that he was just another typical NPC, but that wasn't the case at all.

His words flowed smoothly, catching my attention. It sounded deep and ominous.

— H-How… How… am I… remembered…

"…"

— How… am I… being… remembered…

"A lot of time has passed, Fallen King. The once-brilliant Golden Civilization, your legacy, and the eight rulers… have been lost to history in present-day Rohen," I answered.

— Everything… was for nothing…

"…"

- I fought to protect the Golden Civilization… I sought revenge on the eight kings who betrayed me… but in the end… it was all… meaningless…

"…"

— I'm… tired. Consumed by torment and grudges… In the end, none of it holds any meaning…

"…"

"Right now, I just… I just want to grant eternal rest to my loyal friends who continued to place their trust in this unworthy king. I just want to help… my subjects close their eyes while smiling… and that's why… I… I welcome all of you.

"We're honored, Your Highness," I said.

— I'm not expecting… any big… I won't ask… you to spread… the truth. It's not easy even for me… to see what… the truth is… How I will be remembered in history… is something for the descendants to decide. The ghost of the past… is merely that. A ghost…

"…"

— So that Rohen's descendants will not just know the history of those who triumphed… I want you to take away the records of me and my comrades. Promise me.

"I give you my word," I said.

— That… is all I need.

"…"

— I want to close my eyes now.

The Fallen King slowly collapsed on the throne, and the lingering resentment, which had been holding his body together, slowly faded away.

I was sure the people outside were experiencing the same phenomenon. This

was the end of the king and his subjects, who had been waiting to die for a long time. They had been waiting for this day.

Obviously, I was struck by an emotion I couldn't quite describe. Although they had already died and had lost the forms they once knew, their final farewell left something that couldn't be put into words.

'It's time for the light.'

All I could do was ease their passage and to light… a path. Anyone who saw me would think that I was comforting them with holy power. This was the final act of compassion for the restless, trapped in this world by their meaningless regret.

I stepped forward, and they moved aside, and the scene was reminiscent of the Red Sea's parting.

Even Woo Hyo-Yeol moved quietly.

I lowered my head and pressed my forehead against the skeletal remains of the king's foot and offered a silent tribute to his passing.

"…"

It was a ritual performed by the Flower and Fertility Familia, and it was meant to comfort wandering souls.

Just then, a radiant light illuminated the Fallen King's stone chamber.

CHAPTER 1141
FALLEN KING'S TOMB (7)

'I thought I was going to spend hours listening to the old man talk.'

It was nice to finish work early.

'Resting while having a cup of coffee would be perfect.'

If the Fallen King had been a chatterbox, it would have been a really painful time. If we were on our continent, I would listen to him with a lot of interest, but he was alive during Rohen's Golden Civilization era of whatever, which had nothing to do with me.

Nam Goong-Seon was the only one who listened. She seemed interested in their records, but she also seemed out of it because of the radiant light.

"Wooow…" Lim Chae-Ryeong exclaimed unknowingly, and she hurriedly covered her mouth. She probably saw my face. She had to have exclaimed because she was happy about clearing the dungeon and witnessing something beautiful.

The moment she noticed how I faced death as a mere twenty-three-year-old, she could no longer express the same emotions.

"…"

Of course, Jung Ha-Yan looked at me with wide eyes.

"O-Oppa… y-you've become… a f-flower," Jung Ha-Yan said.

'This is your first time seeing me as Flower Ki-Young, isn't it?'

"T-The flower that's shining from your body… m-me and… S-Sora, look at—"

Jung Ha-Yan paused.

'Sora's not here… '

"O-O-Oppa… b-became a flower," Jung Ha-Yan added.

I was comforting the cursed ones while wearing a crown made out of light. The light coming from my fingertips purified the darkness, and flowers of light bloomed throughout the tomb.

The way the flowers fully bloomed before fading away was mesmerizing even in my eyes. The brilliant light was so overwhelming that I wondered if I was going to go blind, but it actually enveloped the party members in a warm and comforting light.

"It's warm…" Nam Goong-Seon mumbled.

'I'm sure these undead creatures are thinking the same thing.'

Of course, holy power wasn't exactly a friendly energy for undead creatures, but at least they wouldn't experience pain as if they were burning in hell. As their lingering grudges faded away, they'd probably experience some positive effects.

The sight was something out of a fairy tale, so of course, everyone had their own opinions about it.

"I… finally realized it," No Dam-Hye said.

'What have you realized, Dam-Hye?'

"The reason… I joined this party. I thought… it was a pull of fate or something beyond words, but…" No Dam-Hye paused.

'There's no such thing.'

"…"

“I think I’m here to tell people about sights like this,” No Dam-Hye continued.

‘That’s not true. You’re a combatant as well. You have to awaken as well.’

“I think I was given the role of a bard… to tell these stories,” No Dam-Hye added.

No Dam-Hye suddenly started playing music.

‘What’s with the music all of a sudden? Why are you acting out?’

The atmosphere was so serious that I doubted if background music was even necessary, but the background music was starting to overwhelm me.

I was worried she was going to write a song about the Fallen King on the spot and start singing, but it was clear that No Dam-Hye was speechless. Thankfully, the party members didn’t seem to think much about it.

‘Yeah, I should just let them do whatever they want.’

I couldn’t really understand those who called themselves artists, but letting them do whatever they wanted was the most efficient way of doing things.

It actually wasn’t that bad. The Saint of Flower and Fertility would eventually leave this place anyway. A song to remember me would be advantageous for me in many ways. This could actually be good for those with old-fashioned tastes. It would be cheesy to hear people say, “Grandpa is getting all sentimental,” but there was a market for it.

The scene was kind of cheesy, but watching the situation from the sidelines wasn’t that bad. A requiem for the wandering souls filled the stone chamber along with the light. As the music played, radiant light illuminated the place, creating a holy atmosphere.

— T-Thanks, Rohen’s descendants.

“…”

— Thanks…

The Fallen King and his loyal subjects transformed into gimmering blue dust and scattered in the air.

[Level 3 Dungeon. The Fallen King's Tomb has been cleared.]

A small message popped up, but I was sure everyone felt like they had achieved something great. They probably wanted to cheer, but due to the serious atmosphere, they were feeling wary.

I clapped as if it weren't a big deal and said, "We cleared the first dungeon."

"…"

"Great work, everyone," I said.

And that was when they started cheering…

"*Heh… hehehe…*"

"*Aaaaah!* Unni! Unni! We did it!" Lim Chae-Ryeong shouted.

"I-I got it, so give me some space, Chae-Ryeong," Nam Goong-Seon said.

"*Hm*… I'm glad," Raymond said.

"We did it. We actually did it," Lim Chae-Ryeong mumbled.

Of course, someone was bound to ruin the mood.

As I expected, Woo Hyo-Yeol couldn't read the room and said, "How ridiculous. It was just a Level 3 dungeon."

"Do you really have to say that?" Lim Chae-Ryeong questioned.

"*Hmph.*"

“It’s worth celebrating. More importantly, we cleared the dungeon as a party. The beginning is half the journey. The result wasn’t bad… and I managed to take care of the homework I couldn’t finish because of the party,” I said.

“…”

“…”

“Homework?” he asked.

“I took on some debt to prepare for the expedition,” I answered.

“What?”

‘Why are you acting as if you’re in a bad mood?’

“It’s not a lot. I borrowed the money legally. I borrowed it using my name, so you don’t have to worry too much,” I reassured him.

“…”

“Of course, the debt isn’t the only homework. I’m sure you realized it as well, but the entire party needs to increase their stats. The preparation wasn’t that expensive, but renting decent equipment requires a lot of gold.

“It’s true that I’m kind of disappointed by the fact that it’s Level 3 gear, but the rewards of this dungeon are even better than I thought,” I explained.

“…”

“And more importantly,” I paused.

“Wow!!! A-Awesome! Awesome!”

I succeeded in getting the GENIUSES’ attention.

I was already getting congratulatory messages for clearing a Level 3 dungeon, and I was sure it was the same for the others. Woo Hyo-Yeol and

Jung Ha-Yan could grow stronger without the GENIUSES' help, but it wasn't the case for the other party members.

Between Nam Goong-Seon, Lim Chae-Ryeong, Raymond Bolt, and No Dam-Hye, Nam Goong-Seon was in a better situation because she had been receiving support from low-ranking gods.

Raymond Bolt looked like he had a GENIUS as well, but since he hadn't been on the frontline for quite a while now, he clearly wasn't receiving any support from his GENIUS. I was sure Lim Chae-Ryeong had never received any attention from a GENIUS.

No Dam-Hye was a non-combatant, so she was excluded.

Basically, the members who weren't receiving attention were getting a lot of attention.

The party members' futures were guaranteed thanks to Woo Hyo-Yeol, Jung Ha-Yan, and myself. I had a hunch that they would become huge, but we cleared the Level 3 dungeon without many issues, and they had proven their worth as well.

Instead of getting carried, they had proven that they were worth the investment, so of course, the GENIUSES were feeling agitated.

"*Ah!* Thank you! Five hundred coins… *ah*… a thousand coins! Thank you very much for the donations!"

"…"

"Thank you, A Gentle Glow that Reassures the Forgotten. I'll work even harder. *Ah*… you didn't have to donate so much…"

"…" "I appreciate it."

Grandpa Raymond Bolt said nothing, but I saw him mumbling quietly to himself. The sight made me think that it had been a while since he

communicated with the GENIUSES.

And that was when I heard a loud voice…

"*Ahhhhhh!* What the heeeeeeeeeeell! Five thousand coins! Five thousand coins!!! Who was it? Thank you so much! I won't forget your kindness!"

'It's to be expected since Woo Hyo-Yeol trained her.'

"W-What?! What the heck? I… I feel strange right now. Wow! Woooow!"

'You're making a big deal out of this.'

Of course, this wasn't the end.

"*Huh? Huh?* I-I…!"

"…"

"I… think I got chosen."

"…"

"W-Wait, I'm getting too many messages… Hold on. Wait. I-I don't think I should decide by myself. I'm sorry, GENIUSES. Please wait a moment," Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

"…" "Mr. Lee Ki-Young, what should I do? R-Right now! The GENIUSES…"

'This is important.'

"Just… calm down…" I told her.

"*Ah*, right! I-I need to calm down. I need to calm down, but right now, they keep—"

"How many of them are there?" I asked.

“I’m not sure. A-about ten… GENIUSES have chosen me… Wait, there are more…” Lim Chae-Ryeong answered.

“I think it’s best if you ask about the jobs you can get,” I suggested.

“C-Can I do that?” Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

‘Why not? You’re the one in charge right now.’

“Yes, you have to do that,” I answered.

[Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ says they recommend the Bird Engulfed in Flames. They said they already sent a message to Player Lim Chae-Ryeong and that they’ll give a special gift that’s different from the other GENIUSES.]

[The Ancient Scripture warns that the Bird Engulfed in Flames will not be a good match for Player Lim Chae-Ryeong.]

[Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ laughs in disbelief.]

[The Ancient Scripture mumbles that they see potential in her becoming a holy knight.]

[The Slender Tentacle Queen♥ is starting to take an interest in Player Lim Chae-Ryeong. She says that corrupting her will be a rewarding task.]

[He Who Sits on the Golden Throne♥ is asking about Player Raymond Bolt. He’s asking if there’s a chance he might choose another GENIUS, but adds that he wants to watch him a little bit more.]

[The Bluebird Cries Mournfully is wondering which GENIUSES sent a message to Player Lim Chae-Ryeong.]

‘Yeah, I’m curious as well.’

As expected, it became a chaotic party.

Some GENIUSES were making indirect requests, while others showed interest in the party members. Many messages were saying that it was fine or that it wasn't fine, along with other excuses. It was so rowdy that the chaos was comparable to the Demon King of Sunset's first appearance.

The GENIUSES with hearts were at least being respectful. However, the insignificant gods whose names I had never even heard of until now were making a big deal, so I couldn't help but think that there was a trap card here.

"The first GENIUS is the Mother of Six Spirits. She said she'd give me the Level 3 Spirit Rogue job! She said she'll also give me a ring that will increase my affinity with spirits!" Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

'A Spirit Rogue? The name alone already makes it sound like a useless job.'

"Th-That's not all. She said she'll give me Sylph's Boots as well! She'll also keep donating coins… and update my job each time I level up…" Lim Chae-Ryeong added.

'All these gifts are making me feel uneasy.'

"The second GENIUS is the Bird Engulfed in Flames! They said that they could offer a unique job to me, and it's called Fire Walker! Wow! I can use fire mage buffs without any penalties…" Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

"…"

"T-The third one is…" Lim Chae-Ryeong trailed off.

'It's a hassle trying to pick out the trap cards… '

I thought Woo Hyo-Yeol wasn't interested, but he quietly approached us.

"A Spirit Rogue? That sounds pretty—" I remarked.

"Right?! Not bad, right? Spirit Rogue!" Lim Chae-Ryeong interrupted me.

As expected, I immediately heard *his* voice.

"*Hmph.*"

CHAPTER 1142
FALLEN KING'S TOMB (8)

"Will it really be okay, Mr. Lee Ki-Young? A Spirit Rogue…" Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

"Personally, I think it's one of the best choices, and I like that she'll continuously update your job. The base of that job is Spiritual Sorcerer, and I believe affinity is important, so if they're also going to provide you with items—"

"*Ah!* She just spoke again. She said she'd provide me with items that'd increase my affinity each time I level up," she interrupted me.

"*Hmph*." Woo Hyo-Yeol harrumphed to express that he had something to say, but the excited Lim Chae-Ryeong couldn't hear him.

Obviously, I was intentionally ignoring him as well. He frowned a bit, but since he didn't walk away or anything, it was clear that he wanted to express his opinion as well.

'It's a good sign.'

He just couldn't find the right time to say it… but at least he was taking the initiative to say something.

"It'd be nice if you had a good mentor… I think the Flower and Fertility Familia has a Spiritual Sorcerer. Her name is Emilia…" I said.

"*Ah!* I know her! Spiritual Sorcerer Emilia! *Wow! Wooow!*" Lim Chae-Ryeong exclaimed.

"I can't guarantee it, but if you choose to be a Spirit Rogue… I can probably arrange a meeting," I said.

“What? Really? Really?!” Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

“*Hmph.*” Woo Hyo-Yeol harrumphed again. I was sure he wanted to protect this young child from falling for the Mother of Six Spirits and choosing the Spirit Rogue. Even the innocent Flower Ki-Young was pushing for the Spirit Rogue, so of course, he was feeling frustrated.

He seemed worried about losing the unrefined gem that he had painstakingly found.

He was also questioning me, but…

‘It won’t hurt to show my weakness once in a while.’

How could a twenty-three-year-old like me be perfect?

I was perfect in dungeon research… and even in sword techniques. I also had the title “Genius Tactician.” However, I wouldn’t be relatable if I were too perfect. Since I had left a good impression through my great performance, this was the time to show my clumsy side.

I had to pretend like I was still not exactly aware of how Rohen’s GENIUS system worked.

“If you can summon mid-rank spirits, you can entrust them with one of the weaker spots in the formation,” I said.

“*Ahh*, you’re right! Since we tend to leave the left side of our formation open, I think that’s a great idea. You’re right,” Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

“*Hmph.*”

That was the third harrumph.

I wanted to ignore him again, but I couldn’t do that because the kind-hearted Nam Goong-Seon said, “I… think the party leader has something he wants to say.”

"…"

"…"

"I want to say that it's a stupid choice," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"What?"

"Mother of Six Spirits?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"That's right! The Mother of Six Spirits offered the Spirit Rogue—"

"What I'm trying to say is that there are GENIUSES who specialize in certain classes," Woo Hyo-Yeol interrupted her.

'Yeah, I agree.'

"The Mother of Six Spirits is a GENIUS who specializes in training Spirit Sorcerers. Do you understand what I'm saying?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"N-Not really…" Lim Chae-Ryeong answered.

"What I'm trying to say is that you won't achieve the efficiency you're expecting. It'd be a different story if you had talent as a Spirit Sorcerer, but most dual classes created from the GENIUSES' greed end up being useless," Woo Hyo-Yeol explained.

'There's a reason I didn't choose the Saint of Sunset.'

Kim Hyun-Sung's understanding of the priest class was basically zero. Of course, as a regressor who had experienced countless battles, he probably knew which skills and abilities were good, but creating an actual class was a completely different story.

Overall, he would have to consider skills, mana efficiency, and stats adjustments. There were also a ton of small details he had to think about.

The Saint of Sunset class was probably a useless job that was capable of making huge explosions. To make things worse, the firepower wouldn't be that great, as the system would surely nerf it. I was sure I'd become exhausted after using just one skill.

It was the same for the Mother of Six Spirits. The dual class she had created at the last minute was probably useless because she only made it to obtain some Lee Ki-Young Coin.

"B-But the members of the Flower and Fertility Familia have a variety of jobs! That's—"

"The situation is different for GENIUSES who are taking care of major familias. They have already developed their own methods when it comes to developing their members," Woo Hyo-Yeol interrupted her.

"*Ugh…*"

"And you don't have talent as a Spirit Sorcerer, do you? Hey kid, have you even heard a spirit's voice?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

'Of course not.'

"It's the same for the Fire Walker job. The Bird Engulfed in Flames… I've heard of that GENIUS before, but they don't fit you. You won't be able to handle that GENIUS," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"What are you saying?!"

"It means that high-ranking GENIUSES will make classes for high-ranking players, dummy. Being able to cast fire spells without any penalties is a great ability, but will you be able to handle all the other abilities? You think Raymond Bolt didn't get into a contract with high-ranking GENIUSES because he's stupid?" Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

"*Ah…*"

He was right.

“If you bite off more than you can chew, your body will suffer from the inside. You’ve already hit your limit,” Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

Lim Chae-Ryeong, who seemed to be upset by Woo Hyo-Yeol’s chiding, suddenly became embarrassed. The room became silent.

“A-Are you worried about me?” Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

‘Huh? What’s going on between you two?’

“…”

“…”

Of course, there was no romance between them.

“You’re being ridiculous, kid. You think I’m saying this because I’m worried about you?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“*Ugh…*”

“Tell me the GENIUSES who are trying to get into contract with you and the jobs they’re offering. I’ll tell you what I think of them,” Woo Hyo-Yeol requested.

“*Ah*, okay. Hold on,” she said.

I had to say something as well.

“Thank you. I had no idea as well,” I remarked.

“*Hmph*. I never thought you were perfect. No surprises there,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

‘This jerk looks really happy.’

He looked so happy that I thought showing my clumsy side was a good thing.

Of course, I knew why he was in such a good mood. It wasn't like he landed a major blow, but he probably felt like he had regained control for the first time in a while. Some people enjoyed getting carried, but he was the type to feel relieved once he was in control.

He was probably happy about this situation, as he had been following me ever since we graduated from the academy.

"You got pretty lucky. The Goddess of Flower and Fertility specializes in the priest class," Woo Hyo-Yeol informed me.

"*Ah…* I see," I said.

"You're clueless in the strangest way," Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

"*Ha… haha…"* I laughed out of embarrassment.

'I don't think I need to intervene.'

After insulting me, I saw him looking through the jobs. I could see that he really liked his line just now because he looked pretty satisfied.

Jupiter's group had promised to prepare a job and contract, but I didn't think it was a bad idea to let Woo Hyo-Yeol make the decision. He was going to train her anyway, and they had quite a few things in common.

"Didn't you hear what I said just now? This is also out of the question. Reaper's Assassin? You're joking, right?" Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

"*Ah*, but this is… Necro! Man! Cy!" Lim Chae-Ryeong shouted.

"Shut up and listen to me," Woo Hyo-Yeol scolded her.

"*Ugh…* at least be nice," Lim Chae-Ryeong mumbled.

“This one… and this one isn’t so bad,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

‘I knew he was going to pick those.’

While I was organizing the reward items with Raymond Bolt and Jung Ha-Yan, I noticed that he had narrowed it down to two options.

‘A Level 3 Dagger Rogue.’

It was the job I had requested.

“*Eww!* It’s so bad! What’s with the cheesy name? It sounds like a low-level mob that appears in a village at the beginning of a game,” Lim Chae-Ryeong complained.

“Shut up. This job is perfect for you. It has rogue skills, and your melee combat proficiency will increase as a bonus—”

“I-I think this one is better. I want to pick this one. Holy Night Rogue,” Lim Chae-Ryeong interrupted him.

‘A Level 3 Holy Night Rogue.’

It was the job offered by the Mistress of the Holy Night.

“If I had to choose between the two, the Dagger Rogue fits you better. The Mistress of the Holy Night is a high-ranking GENIUS. It looks balanced, but it’ll be hard for you to handle it, especially when you’re in a party like this.

“You need to level up as fast as possible here, after all. We don’t have the luxury of taking our time in mastering our jobs,” Woo Hyo-Yeol explained.

“Then why did you give me a choice? You should’ve just told me to pick the Dagger Rogue or whatever,” Lim Chae-Ryeong complained.

“Quiet. I’m thinking right now,” Woo Hyo-Yeol remarked.

‘He’s taking his time.’

The Level 3 Dagger Rogue was guaranteed to be a success. It was the job I had prepared for Lim Chae-Ryeong, but the Holy Night Rogue didn’t seem like a bad choice, either.

Despite the fact that a high-ranking GENIUS had created that job, it wasn’t resource-hungry. It seemed a bit too much for her to use right now, but if she consumed an elixir or something, it could become pretty useful.

I was sure the Night Cloak from the Holy Night Rogue job was what attracted her.

It’d be a shame to miss out on it since it granted Magic Resistance and increased Movement Speed by a hundred percent. It wasn’t a passive skill, so there was a downside to it, and the downside was the fact that the buff depended on the user’s proficiency.

If she was trained properly, she would become a nightmare among those with mage-type jobs.

‘If she becomes as strong as Ye-Ri, she won’t have to worry about her job or special abilities. She’s been making good use of her self-made Dance of Enchantment.’

“Please. Please…! Let me choose the Holy Night Rogue. I’ll work hard, please,” Lim Chae-Ryeong begged.

‘It’ll be a shame to miss out on the Dagger Rogue’s Weapon Block Proficiency Boost.’

Even if she had the Night Cloak, she wouldn’t be able to do much right now, and I was sure Woo Hyo-Yeol had the same thoughts as me.

“Ask the Mistress of the Holy Night if she’s willing to offer the contract again at Level 4,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“What? But the GENIUSES—”

“If she really wanted you… she’d say something, even if it meant getting penalized,” Woo Hyo-Yeol interrupted her.

“…”

“…”

“*Ah!* She said she’d do it! She agreed!” Lim Chae-Ryeong exclaimed.

“Then that settles it,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“*Ugh*… I’m… happy about it…” Lim Chae-Ryeong paused.

“Choose Dagger Rogue first. Once your proficiency has increased, we’ll consider the Holy Night Rogue. I’ll think about your next choice based on the results of your training,” Woo Hyo-Yeol told her.

“I’ll work really hard. I promise,” Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

‘Looks like it’s been decided.’

I was amazed by how kind and warm Woo Hyo-Yeol’s counseling center was.

‘Woo Hyo-Yeol… I have no idea that you’ve gotten deeply involved in all this… ‘

He was gradually adapting to the warm and comfy party.

I honestly expected this, but I only became certain of it when we returned to Harizel.

And it was all because I saw Woo Hyo-Yeol looking at the party house—no, what was left of the inn upon getting burned down—with his mouth tightly shut.

‘Our house… is gone.’

CHAPTER 1143
A SLIGHTLY EARLY TIMING (1)

'Our home… is gone.'

Woo Hyo-Yeol's cozy home. The wild dog was just about to return for the first time in a while, but his home was now in ruins. It was an event that had to happen someday, but I thought the timing was a bit too early.

I was upset because I wondered how things could have been if the incident had happened once he had grown a bit more attached to that place.

I heard him gnashing his teeth, but I wasn't sure if he was angry because his domain was taken away from him or if it was because he no longer had a home to return to.

'At least… it's a good reaction.'

Harizel had always been in a state of disrepair, but our very first home was inside Harizel, so I would say that his reaction to its destruction wasn't that bad. While everyone was still talking about Harizel, he ran away.

"*Haa… haa…* S-Slow down!"

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young?"

"Why is he running like a lunatic?!"

I was kind of surprised as well—no, I was sure everyone in the party was surprised.

We saw from afar that something unusual had happened in Harizel.

Its weak castle walls had collapsed, and we could see smoke in the distance.

Normally, we would avoid entering Harizel and find out more about what had happened because a war could have erupted while we were within the dungeon.

Even without the mainstream event, tensions near the border had already been escalating.

“You shouldn’t just run away by yourself! You don’t know what’s inside!” Lim Chae-Ryeong yelled.

“…”

“I can’t tell what happened… but rather than figuring out what happened… shouldn’t we get out of here first? I-I’m not saying that I’m scared, but something feels off. I don’t understand what’s going on… how a city can be suddenly in this state… in less than a week. I don’t see anyone either…” Nam Goong-Seon suggested.

‘Yeah, you’re right.’

“Th-There’s no one here, and I think the warp gate has been disconnected. You don’t think a war broke out while we were away, do you? There’s no ongoing war, right?” Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

“How about we look for survivors first? Chae-Ryeong, do you see anyone nearby?” Nam Goong-Seon asked.

‘You think she can see anyone?’

“I don’t see even a single ant… It’s rare for something like this to happen… If a war or monster wave had taken place… we’d at least see corpses of monsters or soldiers. Ki-Young, I want to hear what you think,” Raymond said.

“I don’t know either, Grandpa. Like you said, there aren’t any traces, so I don’t think a monster wave or war had taken place, but I’m bothered by the fact that the city is in ruins.

“It’d be best if we assume that a supernatural event of a magical nature had erupted, leading to an early evacuation,” I answered.

“You mean like a mana storm? *Hm*… it does look like it. It makes sense seeing that the buildings were destroyed haphazardly,” Raymond replied.

I could see traces of the adventurers living in Harizel trying to leave the city.

Anyone could figure that out, even without a ranger.

‘Tracks left by cart wheels and luggages are everywhere.’

What confused me the most was the fact that all traces were abruptly severed. I thought perhaps the Demon King of Sunset had used a demonic trick or something, but the ashen skies were still nowhere near Harizel.

Kim Hyun-Sung had to expand his domain, or it would be impossible for the 21st Legion to invade this place.

‘Not only that, he’s probably busy greeting guests.’

I couldn’t think straight because I had yet to have any coffee today. I wanted to take a short break after the exhausting dungeon raid, but I couldn’t even take a break, which made me feel lethargic.

“Mr. Hyo-Yeol, did you leave anything at the inn?” I asked.

“No,” Woo Hyo-Yeol answered.

“Then…”

“…”

He was looking around with no intention of continuing the conversation.

I was sure he was retracting his steps.

“Hey, mage,” Woo Hyo-Yeol called out.

"…"

"Mage," Woo Hyo-Yeol repeated.

"…"

"Jung Ha-Yan," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"*Huh?* M-Me?" Jung Ha-Yan answered.

"Yeah, you," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

I felt like this was the first time Ha-Yan and Woo Hyo-Yeol had talked to each other, but he already knew her name.

"Is this magic?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"*Ah*… a-are you talking about the items that got burned?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"…"

"I-I don't feel any traces…" Jung Ha-Yan mumbled.

"…"

Jung Ha-Yan wasn't really interested in Harizel's state, but she started looking around upon getting prompted to do so. Her careful steps as she examined the burned traces at the inn made it look like she was playing around, but I could feel Jung Ha-Yan's mana examining the area.

It was a magic detection spell that engulfed almost the entire city.

"*Ah!* S-Survivor…" Jung Ha-Yan remarked.

She had to have remembered one of the members saying that we needed to find survivors, and it was proven by how she cast a spell while maintaining her detection spell.

Woo Hyo-Yeol seemed kind of surprised, but it had nothing to do with the current situation.

Lim Chae-Ryeong seemed to have calmed down because she was talking nonsense.

“If a mana storm really did take place—Anyway, there were no human casualties, right? *Ugh*… I-I wanted to rest a bit… I really wanted to take a bath.”

‘I agree. There is a cleaning spell, but that’s different from taking a bath.’

“I was thinking about tallying the items we had obtained during the expedition while drinking cold beer. Anyway, if the warp gate isn’t working… what are we going to do? Are we going to sleep in tents again? That feels wrong considering we earned a lot of money,” Lim Chae-Ryeong grumbled.

“Quiet, kid,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“*Ugh…*”

“We still don’t know what happened here, and I don’t feel any mana nearby. If a supernatural event like a mana storm had truly happened here, it would have happened a long time ago.

“In addition, the adventurers would have already returned to Harizel at this point, even if the city is in ruins,” Woo Hyo-Yeol explained.

“*Ah.*”

“We haven’t even confirmed where the refugees are headed. Have we seen people on the way back? What about the camps at the three-way intersection? Were there people there?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“N-No,” Lim Chae-Ryeong answered.

‘He’s right.’

“Not only that, I can’t even read the traces. Something’s not right. I’ve never heard or seen a situation like this,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

Personally, I believed it was most likely something supernatural, something involving mana or a special ability. This could be the handiwork of a spell designed on a national level.

Woo Hyo-Yeol seemed to have reached the same conclusion as me, but mere assumptions were meaningless, as Ha-Yan was going to give us the answer, anyway.

As expected, Ha-Yan remarked, “P-People… There are people.”

“What? W-Where?” Nam Goong-Seon asked.

“U-Under here,” Jung Ha-Yan answered and pointed at the ground.

“What?”

“There are people… under here,” Jung Ha-Yan added.

“What are you talking about? Witc—I mean, Miss Jung Ha-Yan?” Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

“*Ah*, y-you asked i-if it was magic. W-Well…” Jung Ha-Yan paused.

“…”

“T-To be exact… i-it’s not your everyday magic… b-but if I had to categorize it, I-I don’t know if I’ll consider it magic… T-The method seems similar to teleportation magic,” Jung Ha-Yan explained.

“Teleportation magic?” Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

“Y-Yes… t-they moved the people…” Jung Ha-Yan replied.

“Is it possible to move all the people in the entire city?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“I-It’s impossible to go far. T-This space was created ahead of time… and placed here. I-I told you! Th-There are people down here…” Jung Ha-Yan repeated.

“What?”

“I-Imagine that there’s a wormhole down here… I-It’s like they created a box ahead of time, opened a wormhole, and placed the people inside that box. M-Moving that box to another place is basic teleportation magic… b-but this magic?

“*Ah*, w-what should I call it? P-Power? I-I don’t think a powerful sorcerer can have that kind of power… P-Placing people in that space must’ve been their l-limit.

“I-I think they got help from other p-people… and the method is k-kind of complicated…” Jung Ha-Yan explained.

“…”

“T-The l-levels of the mages here seem low. T-They should’ve been able to resist this… T-They were stupid… idiots… *hehehe*…” Jung Ha-Yan giggled.

‘That’s not funny, Ha-Yan.’

“That’s ridiculous,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“I-It’s not ridiculous. I-It’s true…” Jung Ha-Yan replied.

I activated Mind’s Eye upon hearing Jung Ha-Yan’s explanation, and—

‘Shit… ‘

—I saw people struggling within the dark space beneath us.

‘Eww, it’s giving me goosebumps.’

They were pounding on the black walls in a desperate bid to get to the surface. I felt like I was standing on a frozen lake, and I was staring at them stuck beneath the hard ice. I wasn't sure if they could see me, but I got the feeling that we were making eye contact.

— Get me out.

'Don't move your mouth like that, damn it.'

— Get me out!! Get me out!!!

'…'

— Get me ooooooout!!!

"I-I've seen something like this before. I-It wasn't magic…" Jung Ha-Yan said.

"…"

"I-It was similar… I-I've seen it before—*ah!*" Jung Ha-Yan paused. Then, she cautiously muttered, "Domi…"

"The fish[1]?" Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

"N-No, that's not… what I meant…" Jung Ha-Yan answered.

I saw white feathers floating within the dark space.

"Run," I said.

"Did you say something, Mr. Lee Ki-Young?" Nam Goong-Seong asked.

"R-Run!" I roared.

'Damn it.'

B*oooooooooom!*

A boy with silver hair passed by me.

Everything moved slowly as if time itself had slowed down.

The figure that abruptly burst through the walls took out a long sword from the debris he had created and made a beeline for Woo Hyo-Yeol. The silver-haired boy made eye contact with me as he flew past me. Of course, I had to look away from him.

“Hyo-Yeol!” I shouted.

Woo Hyo-Yeol wasn’t an idiot. He reacted instantly to the loud noise and bent backward to dodge the boy’s sword. Then, he kicked the boy’s wrist.

The silver-haired angel allowed the attack to hit him, but he didn’t let go of his sword.

I thought there was going to be another clash, but when the first attack didn’t work, I saw the silver-haired angel creating distance between himself and Woo Hyo-Yeol.

‘They weren’t supposed to meet yet.’

Not yet…

Just then, I heard a voice.

“Domi, I found him,” Thro said.

“…”

“…”

“Yeah, I see him too, Thro,” Domi said.

“…”

“…”

“It’s father.”

“It’s father.”

A blue-haired boy and a brown-haired girl descended from the sky.

---

1. Veela: Domi(도미)sounds like the “sea bream” fish in Korean 👈

CHAPTER 1144
A SLIGHTLY EARLY TIMING (2)

'Why are they here?'

A wave of indescribable nervousness struck me out of nowhere.

I was sure most of the people here had no idea who they were or how strong they were, but they probably had an idea.

There wasn't a single ant in this ruined city, and three angels abruptly descended from the sky.

It was an unusual and incomprehensible sight, but it was easy to assume that they were responsible for turning Harizel into this state. Moreover, they had descended as if they were the mid-boss of a dungeon.

"A-Angels?" Lim Chae-Ryeong mumbled in a daze.

'They are technically angels.'

Her reaction was only natural, as they actually looked like angels. They had pure white wings, delicate faces, and youthful features that made them look like the very angels humans had imagined. They were also exuding the purity of angels.

'They've grown a lot.'

They looked like elementary school students when I left, but now, they looked like they were in their teens. Children truly grow fast. I saw Thronus expressing hostility with that teenage face of his.

Lim Chae-Ryeong seemed to have finally realized that Woo Hyo-Yeol was attacked just a few moments ago, as she took a step backward and took out

her dagger.

Raymond Bolt also got ready to fight.

They labeled them as enemies before questioning where they came from and why they were here. Everyone was fully aware of the fact that they were enemies.

The sweat on Nam Goong-Seon's face rolled down to her cheeks and dropped to the ground. They were kids, but the party members were aware that they had encountered beings who had transcended human limits.

"W-Why… isn't… S-Sera here…" Jung Ha-Yan mumbled strange words with her head lowered, while the non-combatant No Dam-Hye just collapsed on the ground.

It was a tense situation where a battle could break out at any moment.

And that was when Cheru muttered, "Father."

"…"

"Father."

I pretended that he was a stranger to me. I widened my eyes, and I acted as if I was asking if he was referring to me. I acted kind of scared. I stepped backward and bit my lips, looking wary of them.

Of course, Cheru was disappointed.

Based on the situation, it seemed like he had already heard what happened, but…

'Is he crying?'

He seemed to have a hard time controlling his emotions, and it wasn't that strange, as he still had the mind of a child. It wasn't just Cheru. Thro and

Domi frowned in surprise as well.

“We already knew this, so don’t be upset, Thro,” Cheru said.

‘Don’t say that when you have tears in your eyes, Cheru.’

“Okay.”

“Domi…”

“Auntie is here as well. Is it possible with just the three of us?” Domi asked.

“I’m sure her powers have been sealed, so shouldn’t it be enough? The three of them are weak and the remaining two… don’t look that strong either,” Cheru answered.

“Do you think she lost her memories as well?” Domi asked.

“I don’t know, but she’s likely listening to our father’s words,” Cheru replied.

“What about trying to convince her? If we talk to her—”

“We don’t have time for that. Father is here. You don’t think we have the advantage, do you? Our opponent is our father. Don’t forget that,” Cheru interrupted Domi.

“Father lost his memories. He’s our father, but…”

“We still need to stay on our toes. Father is…”

‘What are they whispering about?’

“But… is it really okay to do this? To father…” Thro asked.

“Don’t think like that, Thro! We’re not aiming our swords at him. We’re fighting Rohen, the continent that took Father away from us. Our mothers and Master agreed to this…” Cheru retorted.

"…"

"So keep your guard up," Cheru added.

'You don't have to keep your guard up.'

"What about… the others?" Thro asked.

'What do you mean? You guys are being nerfed.'

The four Outer Gods were prohibited from killing humans, at least until Ji-Hye noona and I had come to an agreement.

"Father will be sa, so—"

"Yeah, I got it," Thro interrupted Domi.

"Are you okay, Domi?" Cheru asked.

"It's kind of complicated. Auntie is here… so I can't use anything powerful," Domi answered.

"Okay, then don't overdo it and just support us from the back," Cheru instructed her.

"Okay."

'Shouldn't we come up with a plan like what they're doing?'

There wasn't a need to do that because our main objective was escaping this place, and the one giving out orders would be. Of course they would overestimate me, but no matter how much I thought about it, we were likely going to lose this fight.

Woo Hyo-Yeol could match their moves somehow, but…

'The remaining three are the issue.'

If Domi really gave it her all, Jung Ha-Yan wouldn't be able to protect the other three.

Raymond Bolt, the veteran, would turtle up to ensure that the formation wouldn't shatter.

Even if those kids couldn't perform as well as during their peak… it appeared as though they weren't being nerfed. However, I had an answer as to why they could wander outside the Ashen Sunset Region.

'So you guys got visas as the Outer Gods and snuck in here.'

I wasn't surprised by that, as they sneaked into *our* continent as well.

What surprised me was that they were deployed as reconnaissance agents.

It wasn't a bad choice if one considered it as an effort to expand their influence outside the Ashen Sunset Region. They were still young, but they were capable of making reasonable decisions, except for Sera.

Of course, there was no need for me to mention their strength.

Domi's teleportation, which was her special power, was suitable for this mission.

'And Ha-Yan can hold off the chase… '

If I were to analyze each and every one of them, I believed everyone could get out of this alive, but I wondered if we really had to do that. After all, Woo Hyo-Yeol's party needed to experience defeat. My time in Rohen was short, and I didn't have a lot of time to work with Woo Hyo-Yeol.

Every episode was important, so sudden events like this were important for the story.

'Is it too soon to lose comrades?'

He hadn't even gotten close to them…

There wasn't much time to think because Thronus and Cherubim immediately charged at me. A member from our side ran out as if they had been waiting for them to make a move. It was obviously Woo Hyo-Yeol.

"Grandpa!" I shouted.

"Got it," Raymond answered.

"Miss Ha-Yan, over there!" I instructed.

"*Ah*, okay, oppa!" Jung Ha-Yan said.

"Get it together, everyone!" I shouted.

'It looks like someone doesn't have any intention of escaping.'

Cherubim and Woo Hyo-Yeol's weapons collided with a loud *clang!*

Out of the Outer Gods, he was the most physically fit, so Cherubim had to have decided to take on the hardest challenge. The way he wielded his long scythe made him look like a rebellious teenager, but his combat style was anything but.

He had to have considered the fact that Woo Hyo-Yeol's weapon was short, as he wasn't swinging his scythe with a lot of strength.

Woo Hyo-Yeol focused on using the tip of his sword to defend, but he hadn't completely given up on attacking.

Cherubim swung his sword powerfully for the first time in a while.

After bending backward to dodge the scythe, Woo Hyo-Yeol slid toward Cherubim.

Cherubim spread his wings and moved backward. Then, he tried to grab Woo

Hyo-Yeol by the neck. This was a basic but effective strategy—using mid-range attacks to control the enemy before closing in from behind, but…

Clang!

Woo Hyo-Yeol turned around as if he had been waiting for it and blocked the scythe flying toward him from behind.

"*Huh?*"

It was a beast-like movement, and he had actually used that momentum to charge at his opponent.

Woo Hyo-Yeol's dual swords were shorter than normal swords, but longer than daggers, and his instincts made him use those weapons to target Cherubim's lower body.

The startled Cherubim had to have thought that he wouldn't be able to block Woo Hyo-Yeol's attack because he wrapped his wings around himself.

Boom!

The attack was ineffective because Woo Hyo-Yeol's level wasn't high enough to pierce Cherubim's Endurance.

"Cheru! Are you okay?!" Thronus asked.

"Yeah, don't worry about me, Thro. He's just a little tricky to deal with. He's like a beast," Cherubim answered.

"…"

"Can you beat him?" Thronus asked.

"Yeah, I don't think I'll lose. More importantly, take care of Father for me," Cherubim requested.

‘I agree.’

Woo Hyo-Yeol was clearly more skilled. If Cherubim were the type to cling to the fundamentals like William, he would have struggled, but that wasn’t the case at all.

In fact, even Hee-Ra noona had acknowledged him as an equal.

‘He really likes to fight as well.’

Cherubim was just pretending that he had a good foundation.

He pretended to be level-headed and rational as if he were seeing things with a cold and logical mindset. The color of his hair made him look like a typical water-type character, but his demeanor made him look like a fire-type character.

Of course, he often hid that side of him.

Cherubim charged at Woo Hyo-Yeol and swung his scythe.

I couldn’t really see him this time because Thro was flying toward me.

“Miss Ha-Yan! Enhancement magic! Give me everything you got!” I shouted.

“O-Okay, oppa,” Jung Ha-Yan answered.

“Nam Goong-Seon, what are you doing?! Buff me! Miss Chae-Ryeong, get into formation now!” I shouted.

“O-Okay! What should I do now? What do I do now, Mr. Lee Ki-Young?!” Nam Goong-Seong asked.

“…”

“…”

“Run to the Adventurer Guild!” I answered.

“What?!”

‘If we’re going to fight, I need to change the map at least. This terrain puts us at a huge disadvantage.’

“We’re going to leave Harizel while moving toward the building! I’m going to keep supporting Mr. Hyo-Yeol,” I said.

Thronus couldn’t use any abilities with huge AoEs, as he had to make sure that I wouldn’t get hurt. Moreover, he didn’t have such AoE abilities in the first place.

He was strong, but his abilities were pretty simple.

He wielded a longsword rather than a typical sword. His prowess could be cut down by half in small spaces, and we could prevent him from flying around freely.

Thronus swung his sword at the party’s tank.

After taking a deep breath, Grandpa Bolt tensed his arms, but he lost his balance. If it hadn’t been for Jung Ha-Yan’s enhancement magic, he would have been blasted away along with his shield.

“Don’t rush ahead, Miss Chae-Ryeong,” I ordered.

“But Grandpa!”

“He’ll be fine,” I told her.

Lim Chae-Ryeong looked worried. This was definitely the first time she had encountered a powerful opponent, so she had to be feeling helpless. I probably looked the same as her.

For some reason, I had a feeling that we were going to lose a comrade even though it was a bit early for that.

I could feel it…

The timing to sacrifice someone to help the party grow was getting close.

'W-Who should I sacrifice?'

CHAPTER 1145
A SLIGHTLY EARLY TIMING (3)

'W-Who should I sacrifice?'

I had to look around slowly. No Dam-Hye was excluded since she was a promising talent with a bright future, so I could only consider either Lim Chae-Ryeong, Raymond Bolt, or Nam Goong-Seon.

There was no fixed order when it came to death, but Raymond Bolt, the party's reliable elder, seemed like the right choice. He was someone I had to get rid of someday, and if the team's oldest member ended up dying, the impact could be quite great.

I obviously considered many possibilities, but despite that, it wasn't easy to make a decision.

What about Lim Chae-Ryeong, who was starting to build an indescribable relationship with Woo Hyo-Yeol? Sacrificing Nam Goong-Seong to ensure Lim Chae-Ryeong's awakening wouldn't be a bad choice, either.

After much deliberation, I ultimately decided to postpone the decision.

'It's better than making a careless decision.'

I was actually thinking that it was still too early. The party needed more time to truly become one, and the party members had yet to build a deep relationship with each other. Sacrificing someone using a poorly constructed story would only create tension between them, which would eventually lead to mistrust.

'Trust them.'

'Yeah, I'll trust the party members whom I chose myself. Whether it's one or

two, someone is bound to get hurt, so I'll just leave it to fate.'

A master playwright wouldn't make characters do things; they would simply guide them to act naturally. There was also the saying that characters tended to move on their own, and there was no guarantee that something like that wouldn't happen in Woo Hyo-Yeol's party.

"*Kgh!*"

Despite bringing Thronus to a battlefield that was advantageous for the party, the battle was still difficult.

Raymond Bolt blocked another attack and lost his balance again.

Thronus couldn't swing his sword properly, but Raymond still had a hard time blocking it.

Nam Goong-Seon was also getting exhausted mentally and physically because she had to focus her healing on him with each attack.

Jung Ha-Yan was doing the best out of all of them, but fighting back against Dominions' interference while making sure that Thronus couldn't move freely was tiring her out.

In addition, it seemed like she wasn't really focused, as she was mumbling stuff like, "Why isn't Sera…"

"*Hyaaaaaaah!*"

While Raymond Bolt was recovering, Lim Chae-Ryeong protected the party, but of course, it didn't make sense for her to do that.

Just one second—If Grandpa Bolt were one second late in finding his balance, Lim Chae-Ryeong would die at Thronus' hands.

The training in the dungeon had to have been really effective because the members had gotten pretty skilled. They had to do at least this much with all

the enhancement magic and buffs that they were getting, or they would die.

It was undeniable that the party members were putting on an inspiring performance.

“Grandpa, watch your left,” I warned.

“…”

Raymond was running inside the building to try to shake off Thronus’ pursuit, and he held up his shield to his left when I warned him.

Thronus’ sword bounced off Raymond’s shield. When it bounced in a different direction, Lim Chae-Ryeong threw her daggers at Thronus.

Considering Thronus’ Endurance, it was a ridiculous attack, but Thronus pulled back his sword and slashed out. However, he attacked Jung Ha-Yan’s magic crystals instead of Lim Chae-Ryeong’s daggers.

Swooooooosh! Booooooooooom!

I heard a loud explosion as a result of the attack.

The party members ran out of the smoke and into the narrow hallway.

Everyone hurriedly moved to the next location.

“How much longer… *pant… pant…* do we need to run?” Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

“…”

“W-We are going to live, right?” Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

“Probably,” I answered.

“What?”

“There’s no point in making assumptions. We need to do our best to get out of here,” I told her.

“*Ugh…*” Lim Chae-Ryeong groaned.

“What did I say party two’s objective was?” I asked.

“H-Helping party one? But in situations like this—”

“We have to do it. That’s the only way we can survive,” I interrupted her.

“…”

“Grandpa, please get ready,” I instructed him.

“Get ready to…”

To support Woo Hyo-Yeol, of course.

After shaking off Thronus twice using the same method, we reached the upper floors of the building. Raymond loaded his crossbow and fired at Cherubim.

Cherubim focused on his fight against Woo Hyo-Yeol stepped backward to avoid Raymond’s attack, but Woo Hyo-Yeol immediately stepped forward to take charge of the battle.

“Ride this down,” I said.

“What? I-I’m afraid of heights,” Lim Chae-Ryeong stuttered.

We moved to the next building using the rope connected to the large arrow stuck on the ground.

Unfortunately, there were obstacles along the way.

“He’s coming! The silver-haired angel is coming!” Lim Chae-Ryeong shouted.

The moment we moved, Thronus took to the skies and charged at us with his sword.

Divine Blessing and Shield were immediately cast on us, but it wouldn't change the fact that we were still out in the open. After moving to the next building, we immediately ran around like rats. Then, there was a loud *boom*, and the wall collapsed, revealing Cherubim and Woo Hyo-Yeol.

"*Kgh!*"

"…"

We were fighting different battles, but we were bound to run into each other, as there wasn't enough space for us to move around freely. It was unexpected for Woo Hyo-Yeol, but it wasn't the case for the party members.

Raymond took out his mace and knocked Cherubim back with his shield before swinging his mace at Cherubim.

"…"

Lim Chae-Ryeong tried to fight at melee range while hiding behind Grandpa Raymond's shield, but the gust of wind created by his large wings forced her to come to a halt as if there were an invisible wall before her.

"*Ugh*," Lim Chae-Ryeong groaned.

"Let's move again," I instructed.

"What?"

"Putting those two together is dangerous," I said.

Thronus and Cherubim had always been in sync since birth, and their teamwork couldn't be underestimated at all.

Just then, Thronus appeared before Cherubim.

Cherubim finally saw his brother for the first time since the battle started, and he immediately asked, “Thro, are you okay? You look…”

‘He looks like he’s in pretty bad shape, right?’

It wasn’t a fierce battle, but it was probably an annoying and confusing battle.

He was aware of our movements, and he quickly countered our attacks.

It was clear that we were fast and agile, but he was always just close to landing his attack. We never fought back; all we did was cast spells while running through the maze-like building.

I was sure he wanted to destroy the building or bring it down, but he was worried about hurting me.

‘He won’t be able to do that.’

“Yeah, I’m fine, Cheru. I think Auntie is helping them. How are you doing?” Thronus asked.

“I’m kind of having a hard time. It’s harder than I thought,” Cherubim answered.

“We can’t let Father and him get separated. It’ll be more effective if we fight together,” Thronus said.

‘He’s right.’

We were at a disadvantage because we were basically cornered.

Unlike Lim Chae-Ryeong, Woo Hyo-Yeol, and Raymond Bolt, who had more stamina than us, Nam Goong-Seon and No Dam-Hye were on the verge of collapse.

Their legs were shaking, and they were breathing in ragged pants. The battle

wasn't exactly complicated, but they were fighting powerful monsters here, so it wasn't strange that they were under a lot of mental pressure.

"*Haa… haa…*"

"*Pant… pant… pant…*"

"…"

Obviously, they looked hopeless.

No one said anything, but they knew the end was coming.

"Support," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"What?"

"Support me," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"…"

"Do you think I'm going to lose?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"…"

"*Ptooey.*" Woo Hyo-Yeol spat on the ground and raised his sword again. He seemed tired, but he didn't believe that he was going to lose.

It was like the time when he fought William; he emanated confidence bordering arrogance. It was a type of confidence only warriors who had crossed the line of life and death could possess. Obviously, emotions like that are contagious.

'He can do it.'

He could still win. His performance in the dungeon was great, and his fight against that monster made me believe that victory was within reach. I nodded to show that I had hope.

‘We can win.’

‘It’s… It’s still too early to give up.’

“We can do it, everyone,” I said.

That was why he couldn’t give up here.

“We’ll fight them using the formation that is the most familiar to us,” I ordered.

I was talking about the modified triangle formation that they had learned how to use in the dungeon. Of course, this situation was completely different from when they used it in the dungeon.

It was easy to hunt undead monsters as they were devoid of intelligence, but their current opponents were beings with intelligence beyond human limits.

‘Does it look impossible?’

Of course, it wasn’t going to be easy.

‘But I can do it.’

A story where the progression was set in stone from start to finish.

It contained a hopeful cliche where they would take down the enemy by using the formation that they had learned while inside a dungeon.

The party members got into formation.

The map wasn’t that big, but Woo Hyo-Yeol was still kind of far from us.

Raymond was at the front, and Lim Chae-Ryeong was on the right. We left our left side open, and Nam Goong-Seon and Jung Ha-Yan immediately cast their spells.

‘We can do it.’

“Let’s go,” I said.

Woo Hyo-Yeol swung his sword with gnashed teeth. Raymond was trying to push the enemies toward the left. The girls cast their spells to force the enemies into one place.

“Thro!” Cherubim shouted.

“*Ugh!* I’m okay, Cheru,” Thronus answered.

Cherubim and Thronus were out of sync.

Jung Ha-Yan’s spells were interfering with them at the right moment, so they couldn’t move in sync at all.

“Now!” I exclaimed.

Woo Hyo-Yeol was also using party two. He swung his sword nonstop, but the fact that he was trying his best to corner Cherubim indicated that he was worried about his stamina.

“Now!” I repeated.

“…!”

“Cheru.”

“Yeah, Thro.”

Of course, they weren’t idiots. I could see them gritting their teeth. I had lost my memories, but they looked up to me, so they had no plans of embarrassing themselves before me.

I was the one ordering the party, but I was nothing but a tool.

Unfortunately, the perfectly aligned gears could fall out of place in an instant.

Thronus swung his sword at Raymond and spread his wings immediately

afterward to turn at an unnatural angle in midair. He was flying toward Cherubim and Woo Hyo-Yeol, who weren't within the formation.

'No.'

Nam Goong-Seon was instructed to cast defensive-type spells on Woo Hyo-Yeol once necessary, but it was clear that she had exhausted all of her holy power.

It was a perfectly timed coincidence.

"Mr. Hyo-Yeol!" I shouted.

And.

"…"

"…"

Lim Chae-Ryeong stood in Thronus' path.

Shwik!

"*Cough.*"

A sword pierced Lim Chae-Ryeong's chest.

"*Cough… ah… ugh…*" Lim Chae-Ryeong coughed.

It felt like time had stopped.

"*Uh…*"

"Chae-Ryeong…"

"*Ah… ah… cough… cough…*"

Without realizing it, I found myself yelling out her name.

“Miss Chae-Ryeong!!!”

CHAPTER 1146
A SLIGHTLY EARLY TIMING (4)

I watched as Lim Chae-Ryeong collapsed to the ground while spitting out blood.

"*Ah…*"

"…"

"*Cough, cough…*" Lim Chae-Ryeong coughed.

It was like time had slowed down to a snail's pace, and I watched as she fell to the ground in slow motion. As soon as the sword lodged in her chest was removed, blood immediately flowed out of the wound and from her mouth.

She looked like she wanted to say something, but she was having a hard time talking.

At first, she looked at her chest in disbelief, but upon realizing what had happened to her, she actually became… calm. It was like her face was saying, "This is the end for me. This is the end of my adventure."

I thought I needed to stay calm… and be more composed during times like this, but how could a gentle soul like me remain composed?

Ignoring the screams around me, I immediately ran to Lim Chae-Ryeong.

Raymond had to have anticipated my unexpected behavior, as he immediately led the party members toward Lim Chae-Ryeong.

There was nothing more idiotic than a rearguard breaking the formation.

If Grandpa Bolt hadn't been watching my back, I would have gotten stabbed

as well.

The silver-haired angel created some distance between us, and the party members immediately surrounded Lim Chae-Ryeong. Nam Goong-Seon, the member who had spent the most time with her, was the most shocked out of all of us.

“Chae-Ryeong… Chae-Ryeong… Chae-Ryeong…!” Nam Goong-Seon mumbled.

“U-Unni… unni… *cough*,” Lim Chae-Ryeong muttered.

“Chae-Ryeong… *heuk*… wait a little longer. I’ll—” Nam Goong-Seong paused.

“A-Am I… going to d-die?” Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

“No… you’re not. I’m going to cast holy magic…”

‘But you’re out.’

She ran out of holy power a while ago.

She was doing her best to cast a spell, but the wound showed no signs of recovery.

“I’ll treat you soon. So… so… wait just a little longer… *heuk… heuuuk…”* she cried.

“U-Unni… *cough, cough…”* Lim Chae-Ryeong coughed again.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young… Chae-Ryeong… please help her,” Lim Chae-Ryeong begged.

There was nothing I could do other than hold her hand.

‘The holy power… isn’t working.’

The demonic energy imbued in the silver-haired angel’s sword was pushing out the holy power. I was pouring holy power into her while wearing the

halo of light, but Lim Chae-Ryeong's body showed no signs of recovery.

She was actually deteriorating rapidly. It was like the holy power had become poison, and she couldn't stop spitting out black blood. I couldn't understand it, and I started to panic at the sight of it.

I cast spells nonstop, and my hands started shaking, which was unlike me. Without realizing it, I started crying, and I started imagining things I didn't want to imagine.

I didn't want to admit it, but a part of me was telling me that I couldn't save Lim Chae-Ryeong.

'You can't save her... '

'This is... This is... '

Had she noticed the despair written on my face?

"Please… please…" Nam Goong-Seon begged.

"…"

"Don't give up. Please… Miss Chae-Ryeong," I begged.

Lim Chae-Ryeong's eyes turned to Nam Goong-Seon.

"Unni… d-did I do well? Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

"*Heuk... heuuuk...*" Nam Goong-Seon sobbed.

"I-I did well… this time, right? I did good… this time… right?" Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

"…"

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young… I-I did well, right? *Cough... cough...*" Lim Chae-Ryeong asked again.

I was sure she was thinking about Party Two's role. No matter how many times I think about it, I couldn't say that she had done the right thing. How could I when I hadn't given her any order to break the formation?

"Y-Yes…" I answered.

"I was… a little helpful… this time, right?" Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"I-I-I think… I was… a little more helpful… I-I feel like I can do better now…" Lim Chae-Ryeong mumbled.

Perhaps it was because of my tears, but my vision became blurry.

I was certain that we weren't that close, so why… why was I crying so much?

Why was I so sad?

"*Heuk… heuk…"* Lim Chae-Ryeong cried.

"You just did something unnecessary," Woo Hyo-Yeol commented.

'This asshole. He's so heartless.'

"W-Was… that really… unnecessary—"

"But," Woo Hyo-Yeol interrupted her.

"…"

"It wasn't… bad," Woo Hyo-Yeol continued.

"*He… hehe…"* Lim Chae-Ryeong giggled.

Lim Chae-Ryeong was frowning, but she did her best to smile.

Woo Hyo-Yeol looked upset. He knelt down, which was unlike him, and

patted her head.

This was probably the most he could do to comfort her.

Lim Chae-Ryeong raised her hand weakly and placed it on his face, astonishing him.

Lim Chae-Ryeong said, "I… I landed a hit. *He… hehe*."

"…"

'Chae-Ryeong… damn it… I didn't think you'd take it this far.'

"I landed a hit… *heh…"* Lim Chae-Ryeong repeated.

"…"

"Wish…" Lim Chae-Ryeong mumbled.

"…"

"Wi… sh…" Lim Chae-Ryeong repeated.

"…"

"W-Win…" Lim Chae-Ryeong stuttered.

"…"

"Take care of… *cough*… unni for me…" Lim Chae-Ryeong requested.

"…"

"And… And… s-smile… from time… to time. *Heh*… smile… even if… you're in… a bad mood," Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

"…"

'Woo Hyo-Yeol's shoulders aren't even shaking, damn it.'

Was Lim Chae-Ryeong's attack not enough to melt Woo Hyo-Yeol's cold heart? Had I made the wrong choice? Perhaps the timing wasn't just a bit early; it could be *too* early.

'I used it too fast.'

I executed the comrade losing event a little too soon.

If I had given them more time to create a deeper bond, we would have made a memorable scene. Despite letting the characters control the flow of the story to create the best outcome, not a single tear dropped from Woo Hyo-Yeol's eyes.

He wasn't feeling sentimental, either. He was actually talking calmly as if he wasn't being affected by this.

'Not bad? That's all you have to say? Is this jerk even human?'

How could he wear the mask of a human and act so indifferent about another person's death?

He was probably the demon here instead of the Demon King of Sunset, Kim Hyun-Sung. He actually placed her hand down carefully and stood up. The way he looked down on the dying Lim Chae-Ryeong made him look like a psychopath.

Lim Chae-Ryeong added, "*Heh… hehe…* See? Y-You look…"

"…"

"*Heh… cough…"*

'Hyo-Yeol.'

"*Heh…* handsome when you smile…" Lim Chae-Ryeong continued.

'Did you… smile for her?'

"*Heuk… heuuuk…* Chae-Ryeong. Chae-Ryeong!" Nam Goong-Seon called out.

'Did you smile for Chae-Ryeong… because she's dying?'

I felt heartbroken because I couldn't see Woo Hyo-Yeol's face.

How was he smiling that it put her in such a good mood?

"Chae-Ryeong… *ahh… ahhhhh!* Chae-Ryeong! Chae-Ryeooooong!" Nam Goong-Seon yelled.

"*Heuk… heuuuk… kgh…*"

Ah, I should cry, too.'

"Miss Chae-Ryeong… *heuk*… Miss Chae-Ryeong…"

But she's not dead.

"Miss Chae-Ryeong… *heuuuk…* don't give up. Please… please hold out a little more… don't give up," I begged.

"…"

"Right now… I'm…"

I used my hands to put pressure on her wound. After realizing that I had a potion, I took it out, but I had a hard time removing the cap because my hand was shaking a lot.

My body wouldn't cooperate with me.

"Stop… it… Mr. Lee Ki-Young," Nam Goong-Seon said.

I continued doing CPR in hopes that I could get her heart to beat again. I was covered in sweat, and there was blood all over my hands, but I could feel her

heart slowing down.

"*Heuuuk…* stop… just stop it… Stooooop… *heuk… heuuuuuung…* Chae-Ryeong… Chae-Ryeoooong… *heuuuuuuung!*" Nam Goong-Seon cried.

"…"

"*Heuk… heuuuuk…* Chae-Ryeong… is dead. S-She's dead… *heuuuk… ahhhh…*" Nam Goong-Seon sobbed.

"…"

'What are you talking about? She's not dead.'

Nam Goong-Seon's face was covered in tears, and it seemed like No Dam-Hye wasn't used to witnessing deaths, as she kept staring at Lim Chae-Ryeong.

"Chae-Ryeong… *heuuuk…* I'm sorry… I'm… I'm sorry… *heuuuuung…*" Nam Goong-Seon cried out.

'She's not dead.'

Of course, the wound was fatal, and she was probably losing consciousness due to the blood loss, but I was sure that she was still alive. After all, the four siblings weren't allowed to kill.

The attack hadn't pierced her heart and her vital organs. Thronus probably used a method that sealed or temporarily restricted her movements. If I were to leave her here, I was sure they would be able to save her.

'See? Thronus is surprised as well.'

There was a reason those kids weren't attacking us.

'They're shocked as well.'

They had never swung their swords against human beings before.

They were raised in a kind environment, and they also grew up as humans on our continent, even though their mindset was ultimately different from humans. I felt like Thronus was breaking down mentally at the thought that he had probably killed a human being.

Actually, he was probably having a mental breakdown because I was crying, but I'd like to think that it was the former.

"Don't panic, Thro," Cherubim said.

"…"

"Just think about our mission. Our mission is to find Father," Cherubim added.

"Okay, Cheru," Thronus said.

"Let's get Father," Cherubim said.

When the kids were about to make their move again…

"*Ahhhh!!!*"

A giant beam of light abruptly engulfed us.

I whipped around and saw Nam Goong-Seon with her hands clasped together. She had just unleashed something impossible to unleash with her talent and strength. It was a power that I couldn't understand, but when I saw that light…

When I clapped my Mind's Eye on that light, I instantly understood.

"*Aaaaaah!!!*" Nam Goong-Seon screamed.

Nam Goong-Seon had poured out everything she had. It was a once-in-a-lifetime miraculous ability that could achieve just about everything.

"…"

"…"

It was a spell passed down by the priests of Rohen like an urban legend.

The chance of her spell succeeding was extremely low, and there weren't any stories or evidence that it was actually working.

It was nothing but a prayer to the gods.

She would give herself up as an offering and pray that the god she was worshiping would fulfill her wish. That was it—a self-sacrifice spell.

Considering how selfish the higher-ups were, it was like a wish for euthanasia in their eyes—a wish for a peaceful demise.

'Goong-Seon… I mean, Seon… it's you?'

"Miss Nam Goong-Seon…?" I muttered.

"…"

'You're the one who's dying?'

"Miss Seon…" I mumbled.

It was an unpredictable drama. At this point, I had no idea who was going to get booted off the show. All I could do was look helplessly at the radiant light that pervaded the room.

I felt helpless.

'I-I'm not… a genius… I'm not a genius commander… I'm not… the Saint of Flower and Fertility… '

CHAPTER 1147
A SLIGHTLY EARLY TIMING (5)

The radiant light emanating from Nam Goong-Seon pervaded the room.

The light was divine and magnificent, but at the same time, it was heartbreaking and sorrowful. She was clearly overcoming her limits. Regardless of the penalty that she would suffer by casting that holy spell, she had cast a spell beyond what a Level 3 priest could cast.

In other words, she had reached her limit.

The smart and tender-hearted Flower Ki-Young knew how Nam Goong-Seon was feeling better than anyone. There wasn't an ounce of holy power left within her. Actually, she had long reached her mental and physical limits, so I wouldn't be surprised if she collapsed at any moment.

I was certain she wasn't in the condition to move, just like me. No matter how much I struggled, there was nothing I could do, and the only thought in my head was that everything was over.

I wasn't expressing it with words nor did I show it, but that was what I felt.

"Miss… Nam Goong-Seon…" I mumbled.

The radiant light illuminated the ruined city as powerful holy power rushed out of her.

"*Ah…* stop… stop…" Nam Goong-Seon mumbled.

'She's really going to die.'

She wasn't being kicked off the show like Lim Chae-Ryeong.

She had done as she pleased and cast a euthanasia spell.

Of course, if she no longer wanted to be on the show, I wasn't going to stop her. If things went well in Rohen, she could be acknowledged for her contribution and receive a respectable role.

I could also take her to our continent.

I had no idea what was going to happen if I were to steal a mortal's soul, but stealing a mortal's soul wasn't really that hard.

"*Aaaaahh!*" Nam Goong-Seon yelled.

However, this was really ridiculous.

If things went wrong, we could lose both Lim Chae-Ryeong and Nam Goong-Seon.

If I were to make a reckless bet and end up losing both, I'd end up with nothing.

I wasn't the only one who was surprised. The other members were unaware of the context, but I was sure they were aware of the fact that she was sacrificing her life.

"No… no… Miss Nam Goong-Seon…" No Dam-Hye muttered.

Jung Ha-Yan cast a shocked gaze at Nam Goong-Seon.

'Come to think of it, Ha-Yan liked her.'

Just as I thought Jung Ha-Yan would stop her, Woo Hyo-Yeol appeared… There was a *thump*, and Nam Goong-Seon collapsed to the ground.

Woo Hyo-Yeol knocked her out.

Now that I thought about it, I remembered hearing Lim Chae-Ryeong asking

us to take care of her unni, but…

'Are you being serious, Hyo-Yeol?'

"…"

'Are you doing this because you genuinely want to look after her?'

"You're stupid even until the end. You… and this incompetent priest. All of you are idiots," Woo Hyo-Yeol commented.

I looked up at him while crying, but all I saw was his back.

It wasn't exactly what I was expecting, but I heard his somewhat cold voice.

"Head this way and make your way out," Woo Hyo-Yeol told me.

"…"

"Did you not hear me? Take Lim Chae-Ryeong and Nam Goong-Seon out of Harizel. I'll buy you some time," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"*Ah… ah…*"

"Get ahold of yourself, Lee Ki-Young," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"…"

"I don't like repeating myself," Woo Hyo-Yeol warned.

"…"

"More importantly… It's not like you to act like this. What happened to that confident attitude of yours?" Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned me.

"But… but…" I said.

"Make those arrogant comments that you normally make. That suits you

better," Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

'You're going to stay behind?'

"I'll take care of this place," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

'What the hell are you talking about, you jerk?'

Of course, I was happy that he considered sacrificing himself, but one couldn't have a Woo Hyo-Yeol party without Woo Hyo-Yeol. Sacrificing himself so that others could escape was a cliched but amazing storyline.

However, making sacrifices wasn't a part of his job…

"Lim Chae-Ryeong is still alive," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"…"

"She's not dead yet. The rescue team will arrive here shortly. That mage can probably take care of the barrier around Harizel," Woo Hyo-Yeol continued.

I looked up at the sky and saw a few eagles circling Harizel. It seemed like tamers or rangers who had noticed the strange phenomenon were trying to see what was going on here.

Woo Hyo-Yeol had to have noticed them earlier.

"But… but… you're…"

"Since when were you so worried about me?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"…"

"I'm much stronger than you can comprehend with that little brain of yours," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

'Huh? You were getting beaten by Cherubim just a moment ago. I think you're still bleeding.'

“I-I can’t do that. We should all—”

“You’re really not understanding what I’m saying here, you idiot. Gramps, did you hear me? Get out of here now,” Woo Hyo-Yeol instructed Raymond.

Perhaps we had been talking for too long because I could see Thronus and Cherubim flying toward us.

Cherubim had switched his scythe for a sword, and I saw Woo Hyo-Yeol blocking his attack.

As expected, not a single tear had dropped from his eye.

He hadn’t shed even a fake tear, but I could feel his fury. He was usually indifferent, but I could see a tinge of seriousness on his face and hatred in his eyes as he looked at the angels.

‘Not you, damn it.’

No matter how much I thought about it, Woo Hyo-Yeol couldn’t be missing from Woo Hyo-Yeol’s party. If the regressor ended up dying here, who would stop the Demon King of Sunset?

If I wanted to end this event with the “Leave me” cliche, someone else was more fitting for that role.

‘No… don’t look at him.’

“…”

‘Don’t look at Grandpa Raymond.’

“…”

‘I really want to look at him… but I feel like I shouldn’t.’

‘Don’t look at him, Ki-Young. It’ll be too noticeable… ‘

‘I can’t force him to do it. Don’t look at him. Lee Ki-Young!’

Woo Hyo-Yeol was busy fighting with Cherubim and Thronus.

And he was right; we were running out of time…

Despite his arrogant demeanor earlier, he was having a hard time against Thronus and Cherubim. He had spoken confidently, but the truth was that he would most likely die with them, and he probably knew that as well.

He was going to go down with them. He couldn’t care less whether he died or lived; he only cared about doing his best. He wasn’t considering the possibility of a second chance at life.

This wasn’t strange at all, as Woo Hyo-Yeol had always been like that.

This was his true self.

He always acted as he pleased, and if there was something he wanted to do, he would always do it. He never cared how strong the enemy was or how much at a disadvantage he was in.

That was how he survived his first life and grew into the person he was today…

‘But you know… ‘

“…”

‘You can’t use the same method to grow stronger in this life.’

He wouldn’t achieve anything if he were to use the same method as his first life.

And that was when I felt someone patting my head…

“Ki-Young.”

“Grandpa…?” I said.

“…”

“…”

“Thanks,” Raymond said.

“What? What do you…” I asked.

“It was short, but I’m really glad I met you…” Raymond said.

“Why… are you acting like this all of a sudden?” I asked.

“Thanks for giving me hope to live once again,” Raymond added.

“…”

“Thanks for helping me so that this long life of mine won’t end in a meaningless way, and… thanks for appearing before me,” Raymond said.

“Grandpa?” I said.

“Our connection will never break. We will always be connected,” Raymond added.

“What are you saying… right now?” I asked.

“Even if things end, it’s actually not the end. A smart boy like you should understand what I’m saying,” Raymond said.

“…”

“Don’t think today is the end for you and me. Don’t blame anyone and live true to yourself. I want you to… live this life doing what you want, achieve the things you want to achieve, and enjoy life,” Raymond said.

“…”

[He Who Sits on the Golden Throne♥ is starting to take an interest in Raymond Bolt.]

"Trust your comrades and love them. And most importantly, don't forget to love yourself the most," Raymond added.

[He Who Sits on the Golden Throne♥ is showing interest in Raymond Bolt, the Level 4 warrior.]

"The fact that you came to me… the fact that you appeared before this old man…" Raymond trailed off.

[He Who Sits on the Golden Throne♥ wants to get into a contract with Raymond Bolt, the Level 4 warrior.]

"I was really happy," Raymond added.

The old man smiled at me.

"*Ah…*"

A golden light engulfed Raymond.

There was no need for me to explain that he had broken through to reach Level 5 upon getting chosen by a GENIUS.

Unfortunately, the influx of power was more than he could handle.

The power was too brilliant to dwell inside an aging, washed-up warrior. His frail body couldn't handle that much power, and the sight reaffirmed what I knew.

Before I could say anything, Grandpa Raymond patted my head and rushed toward Woo Hyo-Yeol. I saw them fighting together and talking to each other.

Grandpa Raymond was yelling, and Woo Hyo-Yeol seemed to be displeased because I saw him biting his lips. Perhaps it was because of the explosions

everywhere or because I was really exhausted, but I couldn't hear their conversation.

Strangely enough, I could clearly hear the words that Raymond Bolt muttered to me.

"We will always be connected."

"…" "Our connection will never break. I'm sure my connection with you will remain," Raymond said.

"…"

"Take care of my grandson," Raymond requested.

Just then, I saw Woo Hyo-Yeol leaving Grandpa Raymond and running toward me.

Before I could say anything, Woo Hyo-Yeol carried me away from Harizel. Grandpa Raymond was moving farther and farther away.

I struggled against Woo Hyo-Yeol, but little by little, he was getting further and further away.

"Grand… Grandpa! Grandpa!" I roared.

The enemy seemed to have attacked us, as Woo Hyo-Yeol and I rolled on the ground.

However, Woo Hyo-Yeol quickly grabbed me and ran away once again.

Now, I could no longer see Raymond's back.

"Let go of me… let go! Grandpa! Grandpa is…!" I yelled.

"…"

"Let go of me!" I yelled.

"…"

"I said, let go! *Heuk*… I said to let go… please… *heuk*… please…" I cried.

Eventually, we managed to escape the battlefield. I turned to look at Harizel, and the last thing I saw was a strange wave of something engulfing Harizel.

Then, Harizel disappeared without a trace.

"…"

"…"

"Grandpaaaa!!!" I yelled.

"…"

"*Heuk… heuuuk…"* I cried.

'He retired faster than I thought… '

"Grandpa… *heuk… heuuuk…"* I mumbled.

'Rest in peace and don't worry about the future.'

CHAPTER 1148
THE CLICHE OF A BROKEN HEART THAT BOUNCES BACK (1)

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ is comforting you. She says it's not your fault.]

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ says you did nothing wrong. They're not sure if this will comfort you, but they want to donate coins to you.]

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ donated 10,000 coins.]

[The Mistress of the Holy Night♥ donated 5,000 coins for you.]

[The Mistress of the Holy Night♥ calmly says Raymond Bolt's end was glorious and noble. She undoubtedly believes that this is an opportunity to grow.]

[The Wolf Crying Under the Crescent Moon is mocking you for being stupid.]

[The Lowest Abyss of the Abyss♥ says you don't need to listen to some of the GENIUSES.]

[The Lowest Abyss of the Abyss♥ donated 10,000 coins.]

[The Crooked Guardian is ridiculing you for your incompetence and negligence that led to the incident.]

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ is yelling at them to watch what they say. They're crying out, saying that they're heartbroken while thinking about how you're feeling.]

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility❤ swears on her name that she won't forgive any of the GENIUSES who cross the line.]

[The Boy Adorned With Earrings of Truth is asking why you keep streaming. He suspects that you're using the death of your comrade to earn coins.]

'He's annoyingly quick-witted.'

Of course, it was best to ignore the nonsense of some of these GENIUSES, as they were clearly just slandering me.

I was a twenty-year-old young man who had just lost his grandfather.

My eyes were blank, and I cried so much that I was no longer crying.

It had been exactly two days since I stopped eating and drinking.

I was hungry, but I couldn't swallow anything.

Whenever I closed my eyes, I could vividly recall the incident on that fateful day. I heard loud explosions and voices crying out. It was a painful and sorrowful memory I wanted to forget, but I couldn't forget it at all.

What broke my heart even more than the incident were the memories I made with Grandpa Raymond. His hand that patted my head, warm smile, gentle voice, and warm-hearted personality were things I couldn't forget at all.

We hadn't spent a lot of time together, but we had a bond, and he was filling my heart with something. He was the first person I considered family after being summoned here.

We didn't have a lot of memories together because our time together was short, but I couldn't stop recalling events that never happened.

Some events actually happened, but in order to get into character, I needed to fabricate memories—memories of us camping, sitting in chairs and

watching the campfire; memories of us sitting in the garden in the backyard and eating fruits together; and memories of grandpa smiling in shame after losing a game of chess against me.

I also recalled the time when we went to a restaurant and talked about our lives back on Earth. I remembered asking him for advice back then, and there were also times when I cried after experiencing hardships with him.

Now, it felt like everything was all just a thing of the past.

The sense of loss was great due to the bond we formed in such a short period of time.

It was like… it had never happened at all.

"*Heuk… heuuuk…*" I sobbed.

The only thing I had to remember him by was the necklace. It was mine, and all I could do was hold onto it tightly as a memento of my grandfather.

It was the same back then.

I was incompetent and stupid.

The commander had to take full responsibility for the mission.

Although it was a catastrophe that human power couldn't fix, I had to be capable of dealing with a variety of situations. Seeing an unknown enemy for the first time, I stood frozen and was incapable of making logical decisions.

I couldn't properly check my party members' conditions, and I couldn't make reasonable orders.

Everyone could have died due to my incompetence.

Lim Chae-Ryeong and Nam Goong-Seon could have died as well. They had yet to make a full recovery, and it was already a miracle that they were still

alive.

It was only natural for me to fall apart.

“I-It’s my fault,” I said.

It was all my fault.

“It’s my fault,” I repeated.

I was Raymond Bolt’s murderer.

I was sure everyone thought that way.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young, can I come in?”

I heard a voice outside my room, but of course, I didn’t answer because I wasn’t in my right mind right now.

The figure who entered was none other than Will, but I didn’t greet him.

‘I obviously have nowhere else to go.’

Where would Woo Hyo-Yeol’s party and I go?

Harizel had been completely erased from the map, and the party house was destroyed as well. We had no other choice but to come here because Lim Chae-Ryeong was dying, and Nam Goong-Seon had already reached her limits.

What was interesting was that Woo Hyo-Yeol was the one who brought us here.

The party was in such a bad state that Woo Hyo-Yeol bowed toward William, even though he never really liked the latter.

“Are you okay?” William asked.

'Do I look okay? Would you be okay if you were in my situation? I lost my grandfather.'

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young…" William mumbled.

"*Ah…* M-Mr. William… I'm sorry. I-I didn't know you were here," I answered.

I noticed William belatedly, so I quickly bowed my head.

My voice was hoarse because I had been crying a lot.

I hadn't realized it yet, but I was in a horrible state.

My eyes were swollen, I looked messy, and my lips and skin were. I hadn't eaten nor drank any water for quite a while now, after all.

William obviously looked worried. I was sure his heart shattered when I pretended to be okay. Forcing myself to stay strong probably stirred something inside him.

"I-I'm sorry. J-Just a moment…" I stuttered.

I tried to greet him by quickly standing up, but…

"No, it's fine, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. You don't have to get up," William said.

"But—"

"I told you to treat this place like your home. You don't need to stand up just because I'm here," William interrupted me.

"…"

"I want you to be comfortable… rather than greeting me just for the sake of being polite," William added.

"I-I don't know what to say… I-It's just…"

“You don’t have to say anything. At least… not now,” William said.

Our Will was aware that awkward comfort would only aggravate my pain.

His actions were kind of different from Jung Ha-Yan, who had been constantly comforting me. I couldn’t say whose actions were correct, but I had a feeling that he had experienced something similar before.

Simply replacing the flowers in the vase or cleaning the room quietly while keeping a certain distance was the epitome of sincerity.

In the end, when a silence that wasn’t awkward filled the room, he spoke as if there was nothing wrong. Of course, he didn’t even look my way.

“Miss Lim Chae-Ryeong is recovering faster than I thought.”

“*Ah…* I-I’m glad,” I answered.

“She’s even training now. Miss Nam Goong-Seon is also focusing on her rehabilitation training. I don’t think it’ll take her a long time to return to normal as well,” William added.

“I’m really… really glad,” I said.

“…”

“…”

“Don’t you want to meet them?” William asked.

“Pardon?”

“If you’d like—”

“N-No. I’m okay for now…” I interrupted him.

What right do I have to see them?

Flower Ki-Young became a coward and remained quiet, not giving him an answer.

'They might blame me for it.'

It was the common way of describing a broken heart.

I wasn't as bad as Kim Hyun-Sung during the 27th Legion summoning incident, but I was cowering. This was a common sight among adventurers who had unfortunately lost their comrades or those forced to retire after an accident.

William had to have seen plenty of this sight as well, and I believed that was why he looked so worried about me.

He hoped time would heal everything, but…

'Time might not be able to heal me.'

This was obviously what I thought.

"I-I…" William stuttered.

"…"

"So…" William hesitated.

"…" "Mr. Lee Ki-Young," William said.

"*Huh?* Y-Yes…" I answered.

"You don't have to push yourself. If…" William paused.

"…"

"If you don't mind… the Flower and Fertility Familia can look after you. You don't have to go to the front lines or lead the party," William offered.

“*Ah…*”

“There are many things you can do for Rohen… even as a rearguard,” William added.

“…”

“You don’t… need to be in this kind of pain,” he said.

“…”

It was a sweet offer for the tender-hearted Flower Ki-Young.

‘I no longer have to fight, nor do I need to be in pain anymore.’

I no longer needed to be scared, either, but something was bothering me.

“M-Mr. Woo Hyo-Yeol…” I said.

“He hasn’t come back yet,” William replied.

“I-I see.”

“…”

“So… he left,” I mumbled.

“…”

“I-It’s to be expected. It’d be strange… for him to keep leading the party,” I said.

It was better to pretend like I was relieved.

If Woo Hyo-Yeol decided to return, I would probably have to return to the battlefield as well.

I would probably lose someone important again.

‘But he’s going to come back—I’m a hundred percent sure of that.’

I went through all this trouble to film a drama about Woo Hyo-Yeol’s party growing stronger, so of course, he had to come back.

I wasn’t sure what he was up to, but I was sure he had many questions about me.

He was clearly filming a mystery drama all by himself while asking about the word “father” that the angels had murmured toward me. He definitely wanted to know why I knew Thronus’ sword technique and if I had any connections with this incident.

I was acting sad to prevent him from asking those questions.

‘There’s no way he’ll just leave.’

I was sure he’d come back after organizing his thoughts.

I was certain of that, as I knew that he was more attached to the party than he could even imagine.

“This is the application form that you need to fill up to join the familia,” William offered.

“…”

“You actually don’t need an application form… but I simplified your role and the tasks you’ll be taking… so once you’ve calmed down, I suggest you take a look at it,” William explained.

“Okay. I-I’m grateful for your consideration,” I said.

“I hope you don’t think of this as just a consideration. In difficult times, family members ought to help each other out,” William said.

‘You’re a warm-hearted child.’

“And…” William paused.

“Yes?”

“It’s not your fault, Mr. Lee Ki-Young,” William continued.

“…”

“I… wanted to tell you that,” William said.

“…”

After a long silence, William left the room.

The application form and some food were sitting on the table.

‘Maybe… ‘

‘Maybe this is the right choice. I might not have to be in pain anymore If I go with this.’

“…”

“…”

Just as I had that thought—

Bam!

The door was kicked open, and then I heard a familiar voice.

“You…” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“…”

“How long are you going to stay cooped up in here?” Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

“...”

“Lee Ki-Young.”

CHAPTER 1149
THE CLICHE OF A BROKEN HEART THAT BOUNCES BACK (2)

"How much longer are you planning on staying in your room?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"…"

"Lee Ki-Young," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"…"

'Woo Hyo-Yeol, you bastard.'

"…"

'You've grown stronger.'

The voice obviously belonged to Woo Hyo-Yeol. I had no idea what he had been doing over the past two days, but the fact that he came here made me feel certain that he had grown, or at least, he seemed to have matured.

'He must be healthier than I thought.'

Obviously, there wasn't anything that could bring him down.

Unlike Kim Hyun-Sung during the Doom Ki-Young incident, Raymond Bolt wasn't an important figure in his eyes. Woo Hyo-Yeol considered Raymond a comrade, but they hadn't spent a lot of time together, so he obviously didn't feel close to him.

He had seen many deaths in his first life, so it was possible that he

considered Raymond's death as nothing but another death, but of course, Raymond's sacrifice wasn't in vain.

The incident was the perfect button for him to be attached to this party.

'He's got a sharper look now. When I first met him, his eyes were as dull as a dead fish.'

At one point, he had no faith in humanity, but he was recently in the "Leave this place and run" incident.

Actually, that wasn't the only incident.

Lim Chae-Ryeong got hurt, and Nam Goong-Seon put on a dinner show by performing a self-sacrifice spell.

Everyone had done their best in their respective positions, and everyone went through the same danger.

I was sure everyone felt different emotions, but we all lost someone important, and the loss broke us. I was sure he had been watching the party members fall apart in real time.

Among them, I was probably the most pitiful, and the fact that he was here was proof of that. Despite barging in here, he was looking at me quietly.

I wanted to see how Woo Hyo-Yeol was looking at me right now, but I couldn't look up at him. Guilt, remorse, and helplessness were raging inside me. The twenty-three-year-old Flower Ki-Young wanted to avoid him.

I was sure Woo Hyo-Yeol could feel that as well.

Moments later, I heard his voice. "Is this all you've got?"

"…"

"Was this all you were capable of?" Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

"…"

"Where did your arrogant attitude go? Do you know what you look like right now?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"…"

"I didn't have any expectations, but you're worse than I thought. You're a complete mess," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

Based on the timing and his dialogue, I wouldn't be surprised if he ended up leaving, but he frowned, got up quietly, and started acting cool. At this point, I had to say something, as there was only so much that could be done by staying silent.

I also had more than enough reason to be hostile toward him.

Abandoning Raymond Bolt was his idea, not mine.

Logically, I knew his decision was the best decision, but how could my heart make logical decisions? I just needed someone to blame. I spoke so coldly that I knew I was taking out my anger on Woo Hyo-Yeol instead of on myself.

"Why… are you here?" I asked.

"I came to get you. We can't afford to waste any more time," Woo Hyo-Yeol answered.

'He's right. Each day feels like it's slipping away.'

"I-I…" I stuttered.

'Want to stop.'

You… You…" I said.

'I Killed grandfather.

“I…” I paused.

I hadn’t done anything wrong. It was all your fault. It was such a cowardly and despicable feeling. Shameful and humiliating words hovered at my lips—they were too humiliating to even speak out.

Then, he spoke as if he wasn’t affected by it. “What’s your next plan? Do you plan on adding more people to the party?”

“Right now… That’s…” I mumbled.

‘Is that really something a human can say? It’s only been two days since Grandpa died.’

“We need to fill in the empty spot. Shouldn’t you be the one to recruit the right person for the party you created? That’s what you promised,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

‘How can I fill his spot when I’m still mourning for him?’

“Is that strange? You’re the one who said we didn’t have time, and you’re the one who convinced me that you’re going to help me. I’m sure the old man won’t be happy to see you falling apart like this,” Woo Hyo-Yeol continued.

“*Eek.*”

At this point, I decided to press the trigger button and imitate Ha-Yan.

“Don’t talk about him like that,” I warned.

“Am I wrong?” he questioned.

I was emotionally conflicted.

“I told you not to talk like that! Y-You know nothing!” I screamed.

‘I have to be blunt. Take this!’

“You never had someone important to you, so you wouldn’t understand! How could you say…” I trailed off.

“…”

“…”

“You’re right. I don’t understand,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said in agreement.

“…”

“But I’m at least aware that you shouldn’t be here acting like this, and I know you shouldn’t be acting like this for the old man,” Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

“Someone like you… someone like you…” I mumbled.

“…”

“Leave,” I said.

“What?”

“I don’t want to talk to you right now, so leave,” I told him.

“Are you giving up?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“I’m not giving up…” I answered.

“How pathetic. You think that old man saved you just so you could hide in here? An application form? Are you going to run just because you failed once? Don’t even think about spouting nonsense like providing support as a rearguard,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“…”

“I asked if you’re going to abandon everything just for that reason,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“It doesn’t concern you, so get out!” I yelled.

Woo Hyo-Yeol wasn’t a talkative person. He could have said something, but all he could do was make comments here and there. It was clear that he was having trouble figuring out how to persuade me.

He frowned and made a move. He grabbed me by the neck and tried to drag me out of my room.

“Let go of me!” I shouted.

Woo Hyo-Yeol basically dragged me outside without saying a word.

Then, I saw Lim Chae-Ryeong swing her dagger slowly.

‘Is this what you were trying to show me, Hyo-Yeol?’

“…”

“…”

Lim Chae-Ryeong was covered in sweat, and she could barely move, but she was still swinging her dagger. Despite the fact that she had just recovered, she had already dedicated herself to training.

She looked so desperate that I couldn’t find the words to describe her.

Perhaps she felt like not moving was unbearable…

‘It’s done, damn it.’

This was bound to work.

“You shouldn’t overdo it, Miss Lim Chae-Ryeong. For now, you should—”

“It’s rehabilitation training! All my injuries healed anyway. *Haa… haa…* And when will I get the chance to learn dagger techniques from the Flower and Fertility Familia? On top of that, it’s a one-on-one battle. Let’s train a little,

please?" Lim Chae-Ryeong begged.

"No one does rehabilitation training two days after overcoming death, Miss Lim Chae-Ryeong," said her trainer.

"*Ah*, whatever. This is the only time I can train. I still haven't even mastered those dagger techniques… If I want to join the battle right away… I need to start working hard," Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

"That's true, but you have your limits. What I'm trying to say is that you need to rest first," they suggested.

I heard her talking to a ranger of the Flower and Fertility Familia. Although she always appeared cheerful and happy, a hint of distress clouded her face.

She was wearing the mask of a bright smile to hide her feelings, including what she felt about Raymond Bolt's death. She was also regretful and helpless at the fact that she hadn't been able to do anything.

At this point, I had no choice but to change my attitude as well.

Woo Hyo-Yeol had to have realized that as well because he put me down.

"…"

"…"

Woo Hyo-Yeol walked away, and I had no choice but to follow him.

When we arrived, I saw Nam Goong-Seon, and surprisingly, I saw her holding a shield.

I was sure that was because Woo Hyo-Yeol had told her to learn shield techniques, but I was still surprised to see her doing stamina training. I was sure she had similar thoughts as Lim Chae-Ryeong's.

If I had been just a little bit stronger…

If I hadn't gotten exhausted…

If I had been more prepared, no one would have died…

Nam Goong-Seong was in a better condition than Lim Chae-Ryeong, and I could see that she was taking her training seriously.

She was clearly aware that there was no way she could learn everything in a short period of time, and it was proven by how she focused on stamina and shield technique training.

A Level 4 individual advancing into a Holy Knight seemed like a reasonable choice. Of course, she wasn't a well-rounded adventurer like Ahn Ki-Mo. She had flaws as well, but she could probably fill some of the void that Raymond had left behind.

"…"

"…"

Even No Dam-Hye was practicing simple magic and working on her stamina.

As I expected, everyone was trying to move one step forward.

Woo Hyo-Yeol took a step forward as well.

I looked at him while moving cautiously so I wouldn't get caught by the other party members.

'You called me to show me this, right?'

He wanted to show me this sight.

"I…"

Before I could say something, he started walking again.

I wondered whether there were more things he needed to show me, but I

followed him anyway, and unlike the training hall Lim Chae-Ryeong and Nam Goong-Seon were using, I couldn't see our destination despite walking for a long time.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"…"

"Where in the world… are we going right now?"I asked again.

Woo Hyo-Yeol stopped walking, and I saw children.

For a moment, I was confused, but they were definitely from the orphanage.

They were the children whom Raymond Bolt had been looking after for quite a while now.

"*Ah!* It's hyung!"

"Hyung!"

"Oppa is here!"

The children ran toward me as if they were trying to stage a touching scene.

Obviously, I had no choice but to wait for the children to say *that line*.

"Where's Grandpa? Where is he?" one of them asked.

'Guys… if you ask that, I'll start getting emotional.'

'Can I cry? That's why you brought me here, right?'

I cried quietly and hugged the children tightly. I was sure this was supposed to be a touching scene. This scene would allow the wounded soul of the heartbroken to find the courage and motivation to move on.

I recalled Raymond Bolt's story.

Just as he was going to retire as an adventurer, he met the children. When he felt like giving up, the children became his hope.

The same children were now standing in front of twenty-three-year-old Flower Ki-Young.

"*Heuk… heuuuk…"* I cried.

"Oppa… why are you crying? Don't cry…" a little girl said.

"*Heuk… heuuuk… heuuuuuuuk…"* I continued crying.

"Don't cryyy… *heung…"* the little girl cried.

"*Heuuuk…"* I sniffled.

"We'll always be connected," Woo Hyo-Yeol mumbled.

"*Heuuuk… heuuuuuk…"* I cried.

"Our connection will never break," he added.

Those words were unlike him.

CHAPTER 1150
THE UNAVOIDABLE CLICHE OF SPLITTING UP TO PURSUE INDIVIDUAL GOALS (1)

I decided to change my outfit, as it was the easiest way to show that I had overcome my sadness and had grown mentally to the next level.

Normally, I'd change my hairstyle as well, but all I could do was get a trim. No matter what anyone was going to say, changing one's appearance was important if one wanted to show that one had overcome grief and sadness.

I got rid of all the gear that could remind people of the naive Flower Ki-Young. I equipped myself with items used by typical mercenary priests to show that I was going to start anew.

Of course, I couldn't forget Raymond Bolt's inheritance. I couldn't forget the cheap necklace of unknown origin. The necklace hanging around my neck showed that I wasn't going to forget his sacrifice.

'This... This is what's important.'

Overall…

'It's not so bad... '

It wasn't too fancy, and it felt like the necklace stood out as the focal point.

The necklace could be seen even from afar.

Contrary to its simple design, the robe's inner pockets offered plenty of extra space, making it perfect for storing miscellaneous things. Our most recent dungeon raid was a success, so I managed to get pretty fancy items, along with a robe.

'I didn't go overboard with this, right?'

Of course not.

Changing my appearance was necessary to show that I was no longer sad.

"…"

"…"

"It looks like you managed to overcome your sadness," William mumbled upon seeing me.

After looking at him sternly, I said, "Honestly, I feel like I haven't. Whenever I think about Grandpa Raymond, I still… feel sad… I still feel like falling apart… but I can't keep feeling down."

"…"

"I showed a pretty disgraceful side of myself… and didn't thank you for the things you've done… Thank you very much for taking care of me, Mr. William," I said.

"It's fine," he said.

"Regarding the offer you made, I don't think I can accept it. I know I should be grateful for even receiving an offer like that, but…" I paused.

"*Ah!* You don't have to worry too much. I am kind of disappointed… but I expected this kind of response… If you had accepted my offer, I would have kept questioning myself if I had made the right choice by offering it to you," William explained.

Yeah, like he said, a warm environment didn't suit Flower Ki-Young at all.

Rather than being displayed in a display case, I had to live in the wild. I was a wildflower, after all.

'Will… you noticed. I didn't even have to explain it to you.'

William's assumption was exactly the image I wanted to create for myself.

"I'm actually relieved that it turned out this way… so you don't have to worry too much," William reassured me.

"I feel kind of relieved hearing you say that. I was worried that I was being too rude…" I revealed.

"That's not the case. You're not part of our *familia,* but you're a member of our *family.* I want you to feel more at ease here. Consider this as a house you can return to any time you wish and a place you can rest," William offered.

'You… '

I saw Will smiling quietly. I smiled back upon seeing his genuine smile.

I wanted to ask if he could share the goods that were in the safe, but for now, I had to say something else.

"There's actually something I want to tell you. I actually feel bad because the request I'm about to make is a shameless request," I warned him.

"Pardon? What do you…"

"Actually…"

Just then, I saw some people outside.

"Sir!"

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young."

'Oh, you guys are here.'

They were Lim Chae-Ryeong and Nam Goong-Seon. They sounded extremely happy to see me, and it was actually hard to believe that we had met each

other recently. Of course, I didn't question the sight, as it was all part of Raymond Bolt's legacy.

'We experienced the same pain and felt the same sadness together.'

I wouldn't say that they were overly energetic, but I could tell that they were trying hard not to show their sadness. They also managed to overcome their pain.

Obviously, they changed gears and were now equipped with items they had obtained from the dungeon raid as well as from the Flower and Fertility Familia.

However, the look in their eyes was more impressive than their equipment.

They no longer looked like rookie adventurers.

'Pain is needed for growth.'

And I wasn't talking about their levels or stats…

They had the winner's mentality—I could tell that they had grown mentally.

'They're even asking me if I'm okay.'

"I'm glad to see that you've recovered, Miss Chae-Ryeong and Miss Goong-Seon…" I greeted.

"Of course! My health is my greatest asset. I think I've fully recovered, Mr. Ki-Young. I don't have any issues moving around now," Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

"It's thanks to the people in the Flower and Fertility Familia…" Nam Goong-Seon said.

"So what's next? Hurry up and tell us!" Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

'Why is she in such a hurry? She wants to know my next plan already.'

Still, I liked that she was motivated.

Woo Hyo-Yeol was actually leaning on the wall with his arms crossed, watching us from the sidelines. "*Hmph.*"

No Dam-Hye was no longer questioning why she was here, while Ha-Yan was seated quietly. Now that all the party members were here, it was time for me to apologize. It seemed like no one wanted to bring it up, but I couldn't keep ignoring it.

"First, I'd like to apologize to all of you," I said.

"…"

"…"

"*Huh?* What do you…"

"It's regarding the incident that happened before coming here. It was clearly my mistake," I clarified.

"Th-That wasn't your fault, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. That was… an unavoidable… accident… right?" Nam Goong-Seon asked.

"Regardless of the reason behind it, the commander is to be blamed for an operation's failure. I thought I knew all of you well, but that wasn't the case. I didn't consider your stamina and mental health when I ordered you around," I said.

"No, that's not—"

"It's also my fault that we lost Grandpa Raymond. Had I been paying closer attention, we would have escaped Harizel without sacrificing anyone," I interrupted her.

The party members were at a loss for words upon hearing my stern words.

When Nam Goong-Seon tried to say something, I quickly cut her off.

“Also… I promise never to let something like this happen again.”

“…”

“No matter what. I won’t make the same mistake again,” I promised.

“…”

“…” “*Hmph*. You look a lot better than before,” Woo Hyo-Yeol commented.

“…”

“You’re a little bit more useful now,” Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

“*Geez*, you could’ve said it more nicely. You always have to say it so rudely to make yourself feel better. Hyo-Yeol oppa is already—”

“Since when did I become your oppa?” Woo Hyo-Yeol interrupted her.

“It happened yesterday. Yesterday,” Lim Chae-Ryeong answered.

“You’re the one who told us that we’re going to get busy starting tomorrow once Mr. Ki-Young has recovered. You see, Hyo-Yeol oppa borrowed a party house yesterday,” Lim Chae-Ryeong revealed.

‘What?’

“Nonsense. I simply borrowed a small mansion. Our belongings have been piling up for no reason, so I wanted to find a place where we could put our stuff,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“Yeah, right…” Lim Chae-Ryeong scoffed.

“More importantly, I thought we needed a place to do your training. We needed a place to focus on your poor weapon technique and find ways to improve it. If it hadn’t been for you, I wouldn’t have a reason to borrow a

mansion with a training hall," Woo Hyo-Yeol explained.

"Mr. Hyo-Yeol, you have a tendency… to be dishonest from time to time," Nam Goong-Seon remarked.

"…"

Perhaps it was just me, but even Nam Goong-Seon seemed to be scolding him.

"The management of the party house was given to the children from the orphanage. *Hehe*…" Nam Goong-Seon added.

"*Hmph*. I mentioned this yesterday, didn't I? I just didn't like seeing those brats eating and playing around without contributing anything. Also, let me say this again. This isn't a party house. All I did was borrow a mansion," Woo Hyo-Yeol reminded us.

'Raymond Bolt really influenced him a lot.'

I felt like Woo Hyo-Yeol would become an even better person if we were to gather three or four more veteran warriors and send them to the afterlife.

If we were to send a hundred more people to the afterlife, I felt like he would easily save Rohen.

The situation was *that* surprising.

He said he had rented a place, but the fact that he hired staff members from this place meant he was forming a permanent party or even a familia. It was such a big change that I questioned whether he was the same Woo Hyo-Yeol who hated being locked up or tied down.

"It's cheap labor. It's perfect for this party since our situation isn't the greatest right now," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"But…"

“I won’t talk about this anymore. Don’t we have more important things to worry about?” he asked.

“What?”

“I don’t want to repeat what that troublemaker said, but it’s regarding our next move,” Woo Hyo-Yeol clarified.

‘Yeah, that is important. I was actually going to talk about it.’

“The most important thing is the party’s growth. Dungeon raids, hunting named monsters, and taking on high-level quests. If there’s a way to grow, we have to do it. We can’t be picky about it. And…” I trailed off.

“…”

“Miss Ha-Yan and I won’t participate in any expeditions for the next three months,” I announced.

There was a moment of silence.

As expected, I heard a certain someone’s voice not long after.

“What did you say?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

‘This jerk looks anxious.’

“I was about to say that to Mr. William. I’m sorry for having to say it to you like this,” I said.

“*Ah*, so the request you wanted to make earlier,” William said.

“That’s right. Miss Ha-Yan and I will leave the party and work on the front line with the Flower and Fertility Familia for the time being,” I requested.

“Are you crazy?” Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

“No one is saying anything about it, but it’s related to the angels we

encountered. They clearly called me their father. Did you guys not hear them say that?" I asked.

"…"

"I don't know why, but they called me 'father,' and they were apparently looking for me," I said.

"…"

"Time is short, but I still want to uncover the secret behind it. More importantly, if I work with you, I'll most likely run into them again. I can't become a burden to a party that has to grow as fast as possible. I should be able to grab their attention, and all of you will have an easier time growing stronger," I explained.

"That's…"

"The second reason is that I realized my shortcomings. I…" I paused.

"…"

"I need experience," I explained.

"What?"

"I need experience so that I won't make the same mistake again. I need to be more logical and more level-headed. I need to be able to make reasonable decisions no matter the situation I'm in, and I must not waver as well.

"I… can't learn that while in this party," I added.

"What are you talking about?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"It's exactly as I said," I replied.

'Hyo-Yeol, you're not… upset, are you?'

“I need experience,” I repeated.

‘You’re not feeling hurt by this… are you?’

CHAPTER 1151
THE UNAVOIDABLE CLICHE OF SPLITTING UP TO PURSUE INDIVIDUAL GOALS (2)

The party members' growth path had already been decided.

First, Lim Chae-Ryeong was going to prioritize getting used to her Level 3 job, Dagger Rogue. Once she had built a solid foundation, she could aim for the Spirit Rogue or Holy Night Rogue, two jobs that were already predetermined for her. Either of those jobs would allow her to secure her place among the top players.

'Nam Goong-Seon's path has been determined as well.'

I was kind of surprised, but it seemed like she had decided to become a Holy Knight by working on her Stamina and Defense. I was sure she had chosen that path because it was hard to be one of the top players as a priest.

Her Strength, Endurance, and Stamina weren't that bad, so I thought it wasn't such a bad idea.

I actually wanted to support her, and before thinking about who I was going to recruit or if I was even going to recruit anyone, we were at the point where we needed to strengthen our vanguards.

If the existing priest decided to become a Holy Knight, it seemed appropriate to commend her for that choice.

I wasn't really sure about No Dam-Hye, but…

'Since he brought her here, I'm sure he'll help her grow. If things don't work out as expected, we can recruit another veteran warrior and send them to the afterlife.'

The process was kind of complicated, but sacrificing a veteran warrior was guaranteed to work. Of course, the girls would grow a bit more efficiently if I were to lead the party, but I knew Woo Hyo-Yeol was capable of helping them grow by himself, which was why I made that comment.

Actually, it would be more effective to part ways in a situation like this.

It would be good to nurture them and treat them like precious treasures, but in difficult times like these, keeping my distance was a shortcut in helping them open a path that would allow them to grow.

It was the same for Park Deok-Gu, Kim Ye-Ri, and the other Blue Guild members. It was important to provide a guide and lead them, but letting them leave the nest and figure things out on their own once in a while was important as well.

We were actually at the point where each member had a clear goal.

The problem was the possibility that Woo Hyo-Yeol could leave, but based on his actions, I believed that he wouldn't leave the party.

'You already feel like you belong here, right? Right?'

The connection we made with Raymond Bolt applied not just to me.

I felt bad for suddenly abandoning the wild dog, but this was necessary to help the party grow, and I was sure they understood what I was saying.

"Of course, I'll provide as much external support as I can. I'll prepare roadmaps on how to grow and information on dungeons. I'll also help with the supplies and items based on your growth. We'll also be staying at the new party house," I informed them.

"…"

"I also need to engage in external activities, and the party needs to keep going on expeditions, so we probably won't meet much… but still…" I paused.

‘We’re on the same party.’

“But Mr. Ki-Young. What… should we do? Without you there—”

“You don’t need to worry, Miss Chae-Ryeong. The path you and Miss Goong-Seon will take to grow is pretty clear, so with Mr. Hyo-Yeol’s help, you should be able to grow stronger pretty quickly,” I reassured her.

“Still… having only Hyo-Yeol oppa there… is making me feel uneasy…” she mumbled.

‘I understand. Working with a close-minded guy like him will only give you a headache.’

“You can trust him a little more. Right, Mr. Hyo-Yeol?” I asked.

‘You’re a regressor. You don’t need to worry about me. This is your chance to take advantage of the opportunity.’

‘You can grow a bit as well, and you need to hit at least Level 5 for things to work. Don’t you agree? The remaining members also need to hit Level 4 at least.’

Unlike Will, who unexpectedly ended up in this situation, Woo Hyo-Yeol was slightly frowning. It was like he couldn’t figure out what to say. He couldn’t decide whether to stop me or not.

I had a reason for doing this, and he looked like he somewhat agreed with my decision.

“Did you say three months?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“It’s the least amount of time I’ve set. It could become longer, as I don’t know when I will feel that all of you and I are ready,” I answered.

“…”

"…"

"*Hmph*, it's actually what I wanted," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

'This jerk is trying to act cool.'

"Like you said, those angels were clearly looking for you. Let me ask you this since we're talking about it. Do you have any idea why?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

'Does it look like I have an idea?'

"No. To be exact… Actually, I don't know anything, but I get the feeling that they're up to something. I'm not sure if it's right for me to say this… but right now… Rohen is off-balance," I said.

"What do you mean?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"It's just like I said. Something or some place is off-balance. It's like the things that shouldn't be happening or things that shouldn't have happened are happening. I don't have a reason or evidence to prove it, but I just have a feeling that the continent is off-balance right now," I answered.

"…"

"…"

Obviously, this would lead him to have many thoughts because the sentence basically summed up the current situation.

This was especially true, as this life was completely different from his first life. The Monarch of Sunset, the three angels, the spearwoman riding a black dragon, and other incidents unknown to the regressor were happening.

I was sure he had many questions, but he realized one thing through this incident.

I was at the center of all these events.

There was a possibility that I was connected to all of these things. He could see all this in a negative light, but I didn't need to think negatively about it.

I was sure he wasn't happy because there were many confusing things, but the key to answering all those questions was right before him.

It was a common cliche from a classic novel that was popular on the continent I was from.

It would probably be easier to understand if I went with the concept of being a saint who carried the fate of the world. Will and Woo Hyo-Yeol would understand that I was the card they needed to protect rather than abandon.

'I'm… always at the center of incidents.'

"…"

'The fate of Rohen is on my hands.'

Confusing memories, a terminal illness, the word "father," and puzzle pieces I couldn't understand were scattered, but there was no need for me to worry about them because it wasn't my job to match those puzzle pieces.

'If I get hurt, the world will end.'

This wasn't a bad concept either, and it was pretty effective.

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ is curious about the role you were given.]

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ is mumbling that the fate of Rohen might be in your hands.]

[The Mistress of the Holy Night♥ is wondering how the three angels, the commander of the 21st Legion, and the word "father" are connected.]

'It's the perfect setting to create some buzz among the GENIUSES.'

[The Lowest Abyss of the Abyss♥ wants to know everything about you. They want to know what's causing this current situation and why Rohen is so off-balance. They're also saying that incidents that have never happened before and incidents the transcendents don't understand are about to happen.]

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ agrees. She says the GENIUSES may have to gather their powers within the permitted boundaries.]

[The Boy Adorned With Earrings of Truth mockingly says that the entire group has gone crazy.]

"I'm sorry. I feel really uncomfortable telling you this during such an important period, but…" I paused.

"Is there really a need to apologize? It doesn't make a huge difference whether you're there or not," Woo Hyo-Yeol commented.

"Pardon?" I asked.

"I'm talking about the exact standard that would make you think we're prepared," Woo Hyo-Yeol clarified.

"*Ah…*"

"…"

"You must become stronger, or at least strong enough to fight the angels we encountered…" I said.

"That shouldn't be difficult," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

There was certainty in his answer, and it somewhat relieved the nervous party members.

"Then we'll be heading out now," he said.

"What? Already?" I asked.

“Is there a reason we should be staying here? Also… I’m telling you this just in case, but we don’t need a guideline. You just worry about yourself. If you happen to find out something about the off-balance issue or learn something, contact me immediately. I’m heading out,” he said.

“*Huh?* Wait. Hyo-Yeol oppa, s-shouldn’t we at least say goodbye…” Lim Chae-Ryeong suggested.

“*Hmph.*”

Woo Hyo-Yeol left without looking back as if he no longer had any business here.

Lim Chae-Ryeong and No Dam-Hye, who were going to say goodbye, bowed and left the room as well. Jung Ha-Yan was having a short conversation with Nam Goong-Seon, and it seemed like they had gotten closer in a short period of time.

It felt like the calm after the storm.

And that was when Will cautiously said, “Mr. Lee Ki-Young…”

“Nothing has been decided yet… Was I being too rude? I feel like I decided everything on my own without asking for their opinions…” I asked.

“That’s not true. The Flower and Fertility Familia is honored… that you decided to join us. However…” Will paused.

“Yes?”

“I didn’t expect you to join us so soon… Could I ask what changed your mind?” he asked.

“It’s exactly like I said earlier,” I replied.

“…”

“I felt the need to investigate the off-balance more than anything else. I’m not certain about anything, but I’m sure something is going on,” I added.

“…”

“It’d be great if I were just overthinking it, but…”

‘I’m too embarrassed to say it.’

“I might… be the key to opening the recent mainstream,” I continued.

Will wasn’t really surprised.

‘Yeah, I’m sure you expected it. You probably assumed it while listening to the report.’

‘You’re now seeing me as the saint who’s connected to the fate of the continent, right?’

Will still looked serious as he nodded.

At this moment, the shocking truth that the fate of the continent was in the hands of a twenty-three-year-old saint was revealed, but Will didn’t look affected at all.

In fact, he actually looked at me as if I were pitiful.

He also looked like he already knew the truth. Perhaps he was already aware of the saint’s inevitable tragedy, or perhaps he thought a huge burden was given to this wildflower.

Will looked sad as he mumbled, “You mean…”

“…”

“…” “Yes, I’ll be heading to the Ashen Sunset Region. I’ll move as quickly and as cautiously as possible,” I answered.

“Just as I expected. I’ll get ready,” William said.

Of course, this was a gamble. To be honest, going to the Ashen Sunset Region alone at this point didn’t make sense, but there was a reason why I needed to go there.

Insurance that wasn’t there before was created, after all.

— I’m glad things are going well.

—…

— Looks like it’s about time for him to move on from that gramps’ death.

— It’s been a while since he moved on, but noona.

— What?

— It’s your second time entering Domi’s body, right?

— I’m not sure.

— How do you feel?

— What do you think? I feel amazing.

CHAPTER 1152
OPERATION: DAWN (1)

'It still sounds pretty bad.'

I thought Lee Ji-Hye had entered the continent in some form, but I never imagined she'd enter the continent while taking over her daughter's body. I was sure her daughter agreed to it, but it was so shocking that I was at a loss for words.

"Noona, what about Domi? Is she fine with this?"

— You think she wouldn't be fine with this? She's spending all day, every day with her mother, and it's not like before when I would use harsh methods to discipline her… I've been getting along really well with Domi lately. If you don't trust me, I'll let you talk to her.

"No, you don't need to do that…"

— Also, I don't think you should be asking how people are doing. Do you know whose fault it is that we're in this mess?

"…"

— I'm smiling right now while talking about this, but do you have any idea how much of a mess it was back then? People were crying, and Kim Hyun-Sung disappeared somewhere… It was complete chaos.

"…"

— By the way, your problem is that you don't care about the consequences.

"I could say the same thing about you… Are you sure you took care of everything there before coming here? If you're here, who's taking care of things

over there?"

— Commander Jin and Benigoa are there as well.

"Will he be okay by himself?"

— Who knows? But he's a responsible man, so it should be fine. The problem is that he's really greedy. I'm sure he'll approve two or three projects while we're gone… but I'm not that worried.

— In fact, the proposals he made so far weren't that strange. A lot of things were rejected just for the sake of rejecting them… but now it's time for him to fulfill some dreams.

'That's true, but… '

— Of course, I respect his opinions… but he's just making himself miserable…

— Being too greedy is his problem. That will be his downfall someday.

— *Ah!* Come to think of it, Sahaga and Gela were recruited as well.

"*Ah*, you're right. By the way, noona."

— What?

"Who helped Kim Hyun-Sung? It wasn't you, right?"

I asked out of curiosity, but the answer was already there. If she had helped him, then there would be no reason for her to come here in Domi's body.

— You can figure that out yourself because I definitely didn't help him.

"Don't be like that…"

— I'm not saying that on purpose. I really don't know. Logically speaking, it's probably Belial or the crow… but who can say what the answer is? I'd tell you

if I could, but I can't. Anyway, I already placed the bait.

"Ah, the Memory Bead Fragment?"

— Yeah, that. I really like your story. Our Flower Ki-Young's memories are spread out all over the Rohen Continent. I think Kim Hyun-Sung also took the bait… and the timing isn't that bad. We decided to change the Ashen Sunset Region to the Northern Region. I can't hear all the details since I'm outside… but it's obvious what Kim Hyun-Sung is thinking.

"…"

— There's no reason for him to expand his territory to the north right now, so the central region managed to buy more time.

"But isn't someone else in charge of that area?"

— That's why I'm saying it's good. I don't know what's going to happen, but I don't think the northern region is going to just give us their territory.

— I'm sure the owner of that place will be surprised upon hearing that we were there to locate a Memory Bead Fragment, even though it's not even there. It seems like we're assuming that there's going to be an armed conflict there…

- *Hm…*

— When considering the many different possible situations, this is the best time to create a safe zone in the… Ashen Sunset region.

'Yeah, it seems to be that way. There's a reason why I've been preparing all of this.'

It would be unreasonable to attack the Ashen Sunset Region right now, but we could definitely create a safe zone. Actually, it was more like we were more than capable of doing that.

'A war will most likely break out.'

Hyun-Sung wasn't exactly fond of demons.

'The problem is that we need to deal with Hye-Jin.'

— *Ah*, hold on. I think Thro is about to cry. I'm going to go comfort him.

"…"

— He tends to cry when he's alone. *Ah!* Also, I think we're going to head to the central region.

"Really? Why there?"

— We received a mission. Securing Flower Ki-Young's new recruit is a top priority, but the Memory Bead Fragment is just as important. Someone needs to gather information and deliver it. I need to make a report about the strange phenomena happening all over the continent. For example, an orc suddenly becoming smart.

"So you're going to return to the city, right? Have you already set things up with the key figures?"

— Of course. Is there someone you want to get rid of?

"If there is someone, I'll make a list and send it to you. It's highly likely there won't be any… but just in case."

— You're worried that someone will get in the way when you create the expedition team, right?

"Yeah."

— Then send me the list. I need to head to the city right now. I'm going to feed the kids something delicious and walk around.

“Already?”

— I’m busy as well because I have to clean up after someone.

‘I don’t think it’s because you’re busy.’

There wasn’t any reason for her to be busy, except for exploring her childlike side again and having some fun. However, I couldn’t really say anything since I was the one receiving help.

“I’m busy as well,” I mumbled.

I was sad that our conversation ended so quickly, but I didn’t mumble it because I was annoyed with Lee Ji-Hye.

I still had to prepare for the expedition as fast as possible because the expedition to the Ashen Sunset Region was decided at the last minute. The Flower and Fertility Familia as well as the other familias were well-prepared, so they were ready to go.

Unfortunately, I had been living in a civilized world, how could I trust those monkeys?

‘It’s a mess.’

I expected it, but their level of uncivilized behavior was unimaginable. I couldn’t help but think that even the chimpanzees in *Planet of the Apes* were more organized than these guys.

Someone knocked on the door while I was busy making revisions. I turned and saw someone whom I had been seeing a lot recently, and of course, I smiled brightly at her.

“*Ah!* Miss Emilia,” I greeted.

She was Will’s adjutant, but now, she was my adjutant.

“I’m sorry for interrupting you while you’re working, Commander,” Emilia said.

“You can just call me Lee Ki-Young. Titles… are still awkward for me,” I told her.

“You are rightfully in the position of commander of the allied forces. You can be a little more confident. On the contrary, what’s more embarrassing is…” Emilia paused.

After glancing at me, I noticed her blushing, and I was sure she was talking about the operation I was revising right now because Emilia was one of the people who guided the existing command structure and operations.

It looked fine from her point of view, but the result of someone who only scratched the surface and someone who had been through it all would never be the same.

If she had any kind of eye for detail, even if it were just a tad bit, she would notice the difference between us.

“You don’t have to think that way. I’m receiving a lot of help as well. If it weren’t for the basic guide, I would be lost for a long time. I was able to solve things easily… because you and the others had provided such a thorough guide,” I told her.

“Your words of consolation are making me feel even more embarrassed,” Emilia said.

‘You’re still a bit better, at least. Realizing that this is embarrassing means there’s room for growth.’

Many people would throw a tantrum upon being corrected. No matter the group, people tended to dislike outsiders. The Flower and Fertility Familia was a little better because I had William’s support, but the leaders of the other familias didn’t necessarily trust me.

Obviously, I couldn't communicate better with people like Emilia.

It only happened once at the academy… but I showed the Rohen Continent what a genius looked like. I possessed an overwhelming level of strategy and intelligence that the culprit couldn't even approach me.

It was the same for the manual I was writing right now. From the command structure to tactical guides, I changed everything from start to finish, and the reaction wasn't all that bad.

'It's best to create a strategy based on the genius concept because I'll have a chance with that.'

Those without experience and had yet to prove themselves would make others feel uncomfortable toward them, especially when they were in a commander position.

Who would want to entrust their life to a rookie commander? If I were in their shoes, I wouldn't be able to trust myself completely. The somewhat uncomfortable looks I was getting in the current meeting likely meant it in that way.

"Amazing. I can't believe you did this much… in such a… short period of time. I'm really impressed. It's to the point that I don't have anything to say about the presentation…" Tanaka said.

"Thank you, Mr. Tanaka," I said.

"Even after witnessing the events at the academy with my own eyes, I was still skeptical… and I had my doubts even after hearing Mr. William's words… but geniuses must really exist. *Haha*," Tanakalaughed.

'At least he says it nicely.'

"But I'd be lying if I said I felt uneasy. It's not that I'm doubting your abilities… but I can't emphasize enough just how important this operation is. There are too many factors to worry about, such as if you'll make a mistake

during crucial moments or if you'll be crushed because of the pressure weighing on your shoulders," Tanaka explained.

"…"

"How about we keep the strategy you made and appoint someone else as the commander?" Tanaka suggested.

If I were to interpret this negatively, he was suggesting bringing in a professor who would take advantage of the hard work of a talented college student, but I didn't interpret it that way because it was understandable for them to feel that way.

"It's too early to discuss who will get the credit, but that doesn't mean people will question your abilities, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. How about we make arrangements so that you can make accomplishments in the merit system equivalent to those of the commander-in-chief?" Tanaka suggested.

If they were to offer that much…

'I can interpret it as him saying he'll lessen the burden and help me avoid the responsibility.'

It felt like he was trying to be considerate so that I wouldn't have to worry about failing the expedition. Rather than letting this genius fall apart because of one mistake, it sounded like a message filled with the dreams and hopes of those who wanted to nurture and help me rise to the top of the continent.

It wouldn't be strange at all if I decided to step down from here, and if I had been the previous version of Lee Ki-Young, I would have agreed with what they said. Of course, I was talking about the version of myself before I lost Raymond Bolt.

However…

'I need to become stronger.'

For Grandpa…

'Don't back down, Lee Ki-Young.'

For the comrades whom I would meet again one day, I couldn't give up. I decided to let my responsibilities, burden, and fear nurture me to help me grow.

Instead of nodding, I shook my head and looked around confidently. William, who looked at me anxiously, smiled. The change of clothes was a symbol that I had grown internally, and his deduction had just been confirmed.

"No, I came up with this plan, so I can't let someone else take the responsibility," I declined.

"…"

"If you trust my plan… then you must trust me as well. I may lack experience and haven't been on the continent for a long time… but I'm confident that no one will be able to understand and execute this plan better than me. I'm…" I paused.

"…"

"I'm a genius," I added.

"…"

"So if there are no objections, I'll be the commander," I said.

"…"

"The name of the operation will be Dawn, and it will be executed in three days," I announced.

CHAPTER 1153
OPERATION: DAWN (2)

“Operation: Dawn.”

“…”

“…”

“Operation: Dawn… I really hope the light of hope will shine and ascend,” Kathy said.

“I agree,” Jonia said.

“Actually, based on how things are going right now… I’m worried…” Kathy added.

“I agree,” Jonia repeated.

“I think we only have three days to really prepare—no, he really did say three days, but I honestly can’t remember the lessons and training that we received,” Kathy said.

“…”

“*Ah*, there’s one thing I remember. Our commander,” Kathy said.

“Stop it, Kathy. In a time like this—”

“What? I’m right, aren’t I? Who was the one who couldn’t see because she was excited over the commander? Should I snitch on you?” Kathy asked.

“Kathy!” I[1] yelled and sighed.

'Even in a situation like this… '

I couldn't help but think that there was a reason people called her "Arhendel's Seductress." I unknowingly turned my head and saw the comrades I spent time with every day.

Arhendel's Seductress Kathy sipped the rum she secretly packed in her canteen while making crude jokes. Elite Gambler Jonia[2], whose mind was unreadable as always, simply nodded at her every word.

"I wouldn't say that he looks sexy, but he does seem seductive. You know masculine guys are my type, right? Aleria? But you know what I thought as soon as I saw our commander? Wow, this guy is seducing me. You know what I'm trying to say, right?" Kathy asked.

"Who's seducing who? Stop talking nonsense…" I told her.

"No, I'm not saying that's what he actually did, but that's just the feeling he gave off. I'm sure… everyone else thought the same way, not just me. I'm sure that he's a… seducer… He's seducing… with that innocent and naive look of his.

"It makes me want to dirty that white canvas—that's the kind of feeling he's giving off. You know what I'm saying, right?" Kathy asked.

"*Whoo…"* I sighed.

"You remember how he trained the day before, right? He insisted on training with the soldiers and started sweating—"

"You're being thoughtless, Kathy. Do you have to say things like that during times like this? The commander only trained with the soldiers to boost their morale.

"And your words are a violation of the military code. How could you say such a thing to the commander… What if someone hears you? You have no excuse even if you get punished on the spot," I interrupted Kathy.

“I’m just saying it because it’s just us here. You think I would say this to anyone? If you keep talking to me that way… I’m going to get upset, Aleria. Jonia, say something,” Kathy said.

“I agree,” Jonia said.

“Say something else,” Kathy urged.

“…”

“If he works as well as he looks, I won’t ask for anything more…” Kathy said, changing the subject.

“You’re overthinking it, Kathy,” I said.

“You really think I’m overthinking it?” Kathy questioned.

I wanted to deny what Kathy said, but I couldn’t really say that she was overthinking it.

Even if the Flower and Fertility Familia were supporting him, some things made me feel worried. Of course, I wasn’t saying that Operations Commander Mr. Lee Ki-Young wasn’t a genius. The higher-ups had already announced that Operation: Dawn was his work.

Before he was appointed as the commander, there were already many stories about him.

‘Genius Commander.’

Wisdom and beauty bestowed upon him by the heavens.

‘The saint chosen by the Goddess of Flower and Fertility.’

He graduated from the tutorial with a record-breaking score, and thanks to that, many had their eyes on him, including the Academy. The leaders of the familias who had witnessed his mock battle at the Academy couldn’t hide

their surprise.

It was to the point that people started saying Rohen would completely change because of him.

All the rumors I heard about him were baseless rumors.

The rumors were about how he could memorize the entire battlefield with one look or that he could simulate the battlefield that was changing in real time.

When I first heard that, I questioned whether Rohen was trying to create a hero. It was actually pretty common for rumors to be exaggerated and spread by gossipers trying to earn coins from GENIUSES.

If someone were to ask me if he hadn't shown any of his abilities during the past three days, I would deny it, but…

'How can I be comfortable?'

Training and actually being on the field were different. I had no doubt that he was going to succeed someday and that he would change the continent, but joining his first battle was completely different.

He was a rookie who was summoned here less than a year ago. In addition to being a rookie, he was only twenty-three years old. I would gladly train with him whenever he wanted, but I would be hesitant if someone were to ask if I was willing to entrust my life to him.

It was so absurd that there were rumors about how William, the leader of the Flower and Fertility Familia, had gone mad.

"If we're lucky… we'll be known as the ones who fought alongside the hero who will lead Rohen forward. If we're unlucky, we'll be remembered as the dumbest people in history, but William will probably be remembered as the dumbest out of all of us…" Kathy said.

"…"

"Actually, that might not be so bad. This might even be the end for Rohen…" Kathy added.

"This mainstream event… is just *that* dangerous. I'm nervous as well," I chimed in.

"…"

"I'm sure he's talented, but I don't think he needs to prove his abilities right now," I added.

"You're right."

"But on the other hand, maybe he has to do so because of the current situation. There's clearly something different about this mainstream event. We don't even know if the players who went ahead are alive or dead, and there are rumors that the Flower and Fertility Familia are not feeling very keen about this expedition," I shared.

"Really?"

"Yes. It appears that the commander still thinks there are potential risks," I answered.

"What made him change his mind all of a sudden?" she asked.

"All I know is that the Ashen Sunset is heading north, but I'm sure there are other reasons. The higher-ups aren't sharing any information… so nothing has been announced. I'm sure the commander believes that's a good chance of succeeding," I replied.

"Well… he doesn't seem like the type to play with other people's lives," Kathy commented.

"He seems weak, but he definitely doesn't seem like the type to do that. If

anything, the commander position might be fitting for him," I said.

"A person can't be too kind-hearted when they're in that position. Apart from being young and not having much experience, his heart will probably be tested as well. No one wants to be used as a pawn to be discarded, but sacrifices are bound to happen during war. I'm sure everyone will agree with me," Kathy explained.

"…"

"Aside from being a genius, what worries me the most is that he's still fresh and inexperienced," Kathy added.

My heart was denying it, but my mind agreed with her.

That was probably the reason why the lined-up soldiers were nervous.

"They're doing a ceremony before departure. I really hate things like this. I don't even understand why we're doing this," Kathy mumbled as people moved busily on the stage.

It wasn't that I couldn't understand her, but…

'They need to boost our morale.'

"I'm sure he'll say something like how we can win or something," Kathy mumbled.

"Silence!"

"Silence!"

Someone shouted. The place became quiet, and the flag bearers raised their flags. I heard loud *booms* and saw spearmen striking the ground with their spears.

When the mood reached a crescendo, I saw Commander Lee Ki-Young.

"Ah…"

He was quietly walking down the stage while covered in holy power.

The holy power around him was like a wreath made out of light, and I felt like it was purifying my nervousness, fear, anxiety, and worry.

'What the… '

I couldn't take my eyes off of his graceful steps and hand gestures. He was walking down together with Mr. William and Miss Emilia from the Flower and Fertility Familia, along with the leaders of other familias, but all I could see was him—the commander.

Even their eyes were fixed on the Flower of Rohen.

They looked like Holy Knights in the stories who protected the saint. Flower petals made of light covered the sky and fell on the ground, and the flower of Rohen left footprints as he approached the soldiers that were lined up.

It was like everyone was speechless under the overwhelming atmosphere.

I didn't even think about why he immediately walked down the stage. All I could do was step aside, and the soldiers parted like the Red Sea. The saint of flower and fertility moved naturally toward the open path, and he looked at everyone as he moved.

I know it was nonsense, but it seemed like he was trying to make eye contact with everyone so that he wouldn't forget anyone.

It was like he was trying to remember the ones who were going to die for Rohen.

It was like he already knew. He was aware that many people were going to die and many were going to be sacrificed. He was trying to understand all of that, and he was trying to… endure it.

'I-I made eye contact with him.'

He looked as if he was trying to hold back his tears, and I thought he wasn't going to say a word.

And that was when he said, "A long and endless darkness has arrived, with no end in sight."

"…"

"A gray shadow that threatens our everyday life has come."

"…"

"This war… this fight… isn't a fight that can simply be described as a mainstream event. Our life, family, and lives are on the line.

"Even though I have recently arrived in Rohen, I can feel… the kind of emotions you feel while protecting this place, the battles you have to fight to regain your normal life, and how hard you're working to ensure that Rohen will remain a safe place to live for everyone."

"…"

"I'm sure it's going to be a painful and tough fight."

"…"

"I'm sure it will be a lonely and agonizing fight," he said.

"…"

"The battles you'll fight to protect the things you cherish, and your burning passion for Rohen is burning so intensely that it's hard for someone like me to comprehend it," he said.

"…"

“Everyone, this place is not our hometown, but it has *become* our hometown. Rohen has become our hometown, as the blood and pride left by those before us have been absorbed into Rohen.

“Rohen has become our hometown because you fought to protect it,” he added.

“…”

“Rohen is not a place for games for certain gods, and it’s definitely not a playground for demons to instill fear and slaughter us. Rohen is the place where our existence truly thrives. That might’ve not been the case before, but this has become the place where our lives start and end.

“ We must also shed our blood just like the people before us. We must raise our swords to protect our hometown,” he explained.

“…”

“Of course, it’ll be scary. Who isn’t scared of war and battles? I’m scared as well. I’m really scared about losing many things, but what’s scarier than that is losing our place to live. I’m scared of losing the place I consider my hometown,” he added.

“…”

“Let’s fight together. All of us can illuminate Rohen,” he said.

“…”

“I have no doubt that all of you will illuminate Rohen that has been tainted by the ashen light,” he said.

The Saint of Flower and Fertility looked forward.

After looking at everyone, he looked at the Ashen Sunset as if he no longer felt hesitant.

I knew this was funny, but it felt like the flower of Rohen was growing.

It was to the point that I questioned whether he was the same person as the one who walked down the stage earlier. The doubt in his eyes gradually turned into certainty. It wasn't just us who gained confidence from him. He also gained confidence from us.

"I have no doubt that all of you will become the light of hope and the dawn that will illuminate Rohen," Lee Ki-Young said.

"…"

"Please fight with me, whether it's in front of me, behind me, or by my side. Raise your swords so that the light of hope will take root in Rohen," he said.

"…"

"I'm sure we will survive," he added.

"…"

"And we will reclaim our everyday life and our way of living!"

I could hear the confidence in his voice, and his voice echoed in my head as flowers of light started falling around us. When a radiant light exploded, goosebumps broke out all over me.

"*AAAAAAAHHHH!*"

"*Kyahhhhhhhhh!* Commander! Commander! For honor! For honor!"

"Kathy… you…"

A thunderous cheer slowly erupted from all of us as if it were contagious.

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1. Aleria's POV ☜

2. Veela: I-Is this you, George?! ☜

CHAPTER 1154
OPERATION: DAWN (3)

'Lee Ki-Young is an interesting person.'

He was a really interesting person.

That was all I[1] felt when we first met, but he was truly an interesting person.

I wasn't just talking about his abilities or the puzzling incidents that occurred around him. The person named Lee Ki-Young was someone I couldn't understand by my own logic.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young, the order," I reminded him.

"…"

"…"

"Yes, Mr. William," Lee Ki-Young answered.

Now that I thought about it, there wasn't a person more humane than him. He was a warm and kind-hearted person. He liked people to the point that he seemed kind of naive, and he was weak to the point that he looked stupid.

It wasn't because he hadn't been here for long. I believed it was all because he was just that type of person.

Lee Ki-Young was weak, cried easily, and easily swayed by his emotions.

I was sure his young age affected him as well, but he was more emotional than he looked, and he was true to his emotions, too.

It was the same during the ceremony before our departure.

Despite knowing that he was going to get hurt, he etched the faces of many into his mind as he looked at them. Despite knowing that he was going to fall apart, he was willing to take responsibility.

Despite losing someone important to him not that long ago, he decided to memorize the faces and names of the people who would probably die on the battlefield.

Obviously, it wasn't normal behavior.

Regardless of whether he was strong or weak, people normally wouldn't try to experience the same pain again or acknowledge their responsibilities.

However, he was different—Lee Ki-Young was the weakest person I had ever met, but ironically, he was also the strongest. He was scared of getting hurt—he was scared of it more than anyone else, but he didn't hesitate to accept the pain.

Despite knowing that he was going to get hurt, he had chosen to face it.

Despite knowing that it was going to be difficult, he embraced everyone and moved forward. Despite knowing that he could fall apart… he had chosen to accept the pain and suffering.

I thought he was the most humane out of everyone that I had met, but…

'…Is he really human?'

I couldn't help but think that way. Obviously, I wasn't questioning his character. Although Lee Ki-Young was a compassionate person, anyone would have the same thoughts as me, especially once they had considered his abilities. Basically, he was…

'A genius.'

Describing him as a talent bestowed upon us by the heavens wasn't enough to describe him. There wasn't any sign of hesitation in his eyes as he looked at the dozens of large mirrors the mage named Jung Ha-Yan was showing toward him.

He was taking in dozens—no, hundreds of information at once and was picking out the most useful ones. I couldn't understand how he was able to absorb all that, to begin with.

"Charge! Charge!"

"Everyone! Forward!"

The objective for this operation was simple.

It was to purify the areas tainted by the Ashen Sunset and create a safe zone.

That was it.

Of course, I knew it wasn't that simple. Not only was the difficulty of this mainstream even really high, but we also had quests we needed to complete.

Overall, there were three quests, twenty-four quests when broken down, and more than a hundred quests when further broken down. The operation that seemed impossible—the same operation that seemed like only a miracle could clear it—seemed like it was being cleared really easily.

The name of the operation was Dawn, and the location where the light of hope was going to spread was the holy city of Saint Bell.

I looked up and saw troops heading toward the city.

It was built as a satellite city to house temples, so it had no high walls or any real means of defense, which stayed true to its reputation as a religious city. If one was wondering whether this city had economic value, it had no such thing.

If the influential figures of Rohen were asked the same question, they'd all give the same answer.

'Besides its symbolic meaning, there's nothing here.'

That was what they'd say, and I felt the same way.

It wasn't the ideal location, and it wasn't a fitting place for establishing a safe zone. The city itself possessed a large amount of holy power, so it was advantageous for purifying the Ashen Sunset region, but Saint Bell wasn't the only satellite city that had a religious influence.

The major cities of Rohen had this type of satellite city within their city. Obviously, the question about why it had to be Saint Bell was answered a few minutes after the battle started.

"Charge! Charge!"

"There are no walls! Enter the city as quickly as possible!"

"Get ready! They're low-ranking monsters!"

As soon as the troops entered the city, the monsters made disturbing noises and tried to block the troops. After clashing once, spells rained down, and I heard screams everywhere.

The monsters immediately retreated, but it wasn't because they lacked the power to fight.

It was details like this.

I couldn't see it, but Lee Ki-Young *could* see it. No, ordinary people couldn't see it, but he could see it.

'Are commanders… normally capable of doing things like this?'

Was it possible to synchronize things like the timing of the incantations and

the speed at which the mages in each squad could cast them?

Was it possible to prepare holy power spells immediately when the vanguards were injured?

Was it possible to predict the trajectory of the enemy's ranged attacks?

Was it possible to calculate the variables down to the second and give commands?

Probably not, and it was all because the people who called themselves commanders were looking at Lee Ki-Young in a daze.

"No… way."

"Just now…"

It was like we were watching a well-written play.

It was like watching a scripted war.

Holy power rained down on the injured vanguards, and shields were created in places where the enemy's spells were raining down.

The arrows of the archers landed on the weakest spots amidst the enemies' ranks, while the enemies' attacks landed on the allied forces' shields.

This was even more ridiculous than watching a sparring match where one side was holding back. Unless this was all scripted, there was no way the timing of everything could be *this* perfect.

When the two forces collided, his one word changed many things.

"Push forward! Push!"

"Break through! Break through them! You baaaaastards!"

"*Kyaaaaaaaaaaah!*"

“Move your head, you idiot!”

“We’re going in! We’re going in!”

“Go in! Go into the city!”

Watching from afar, the troops easily entered Saint Bell.

Whenever he said something, I would see an explosion. His words were immediately transmitted to the receiver, helping the troops open up a path. Even though it was only a small-scale battle, the troops entering the city and engaging in urban warfare moved as if they were living and breathing in perfect coordination.

Everyone moved swiftly to their designated spots and without any hesitation at that.

When the allied and enemy forces faced each other and entered battle, the troops nearby joined the battle as well. Each temple was marked with area-of-effect spells, and those spells constantly dealt damage to the enemy forces

— The fight has started! Squad 2, engage.

“Yes, I’m aware,” Lee Ki-Young said.

— Your command!

“Squad 31 will maneuver around and support Squad 2. The magic squad will cast spells at the coordinates I provided…” Lee Ki-Young instructed.

— Yes, sir.

“And.”

— We have secured the temple, Commander.

“Zone A will now be in defense mode. I’ll be resending the mission to all

units, so please confirm," he told them.

— Yes, sir.

— Understood.

"Mission report," he requested.

— We have cleared it, Commander.

— We're done setting it up as well. We're moving to the next location.

— We're still fighting. Requesting reinforcements… Actually, reinforcements have arrived. Thank you, Commander.

"Sure."

— Squad 8's mission failed. Again, Squad 8's mission failed.

"Confirmed. I will change Squad 8's mission," Lee Ki-Young remarked.

— Confirmed.

Despite it being a battle taking place in a small city, it felt like a large-scale battle in the plains. It was the same as the mock battle I had witnessed at the academy. Not only was he fully aware of the battlefield that was changing in real-time, but he was controlling it as if it were under his command.

At first, the troops trembled in fear at the sight of the grotesque-looking demons, but now, their eyes sparkled with both certainty and awe. Some of them were probably aware of what was going on, but they likely sensed that they were putting something together.

They were starting to realize that their small actions had a huge impact on the battlefield.

'The commander's competence isn't the problem.'

He was basically looking into the future. Saying that he was simply commanding the troops didn't fit the situation. I was more like he was ruling the battlefield. It was so amazing that…

'I want to fight with them.'

I found myself thinking that… I wanted to be on the battlefield with them.

"Mr. William?" Lee Ki-Young called out.

"…"

"Mr. William?" Lee Ki-Young repeated.

"Yes? I'm sorry, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," I answered.

"It's a named being." Lee Ki-Young pointed out.

"What?"

I turned and saw a demon that looked even more grotesque than the other demons. It looked so grotesque that it didn't look like it was still alive. It looked like a monstrous heap of flesh, blood, and intestines, standing on two feet.

[I'm… a high-ranking demon. Chalkis of Flesh and Gore…]

'It's strong.'

[Foolish mortals… how dare you step foot into the domain of the Monarch of Sunset? Your punishment is death. Hooow… dare you ignorant fools set foot in the land of the 21st Legion's commander?!]

Its aura was even more intimidating than its appearance.

"…"

"It must be the one in charge of this area," I said.

“Yes, you’re right,” Lee Ki-Young said.

[I will offer your flesh and blood to him. I shall offer it beneath the feet of the true Demon Monarch, the Great Demon King of Sunset.]

“I think it’s a Level 5, no, maybe close to a Level 6,” Lee Ki-Young said.

“Really?” I asked.

“Yes, Mr. William,” Lee Ki-Young answered.

“In that case… the troops…”

“No, I won’t order a retreat. Can I… leave that demon to you, Mr. William?” Lee Ki-Young asked.

“…”

“…”

“It’s not that I’m scared, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. However, handling it alone—”

“No, you’re more than capable of handling it. Can I open the path for you? You can think of it as us fighting together,” Lee Ki-Young interrupted me.

“I don’t quite understand it, but…”

“You can do it. It might seem impossible… but with your skills…” Lee Ki-Young trailed off.

“In that case… I look forward to working with you,” I said.

“You can think of it as being similar to last time,” Lee Ki-Young said.

“When you say last time…” I asked.

“When you sparred with Mr. Hyo-Yeol. Don’t think too much about it. No matter what my orders are, you just need to follow them. Don’t question

them," Lee Ki-Young instructed.

"What?"

"You should get going," Lee Ki-Young said.

He sounded certain and…

— Time to get going, Mr. William.

"What the… this doesn't make any sense…" I mumbled.

—…

"*Haa…* What in the world…" I said.

Something unbelievable was happening right before my eyes.

'Is this… really possible?'

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1. William's POV ☜

CHAPTER 1155
OPERATION: DAWN (4)

— Mr. William.

“Yes?”

— I sent you the coordinates. Focus *only* on my words from now on. You don’t need to think about anything else.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young, there’s something in front—”

— You can ignore it. The operation will start now…

I saw a black energy rushing upward.

‘He’s telling me to ignore that?’

A direct impact could leave the command center, where Mr. Lee Ki-Young was located, partially destroyed. Instructing me to ignore it was easy, but I couldn’t do that, so my hand swung my sword toward the black energy before I could even think of anything else.

It could be said that I ignored his command.

When I came back to my senses and was about to give an excuse, I heard his voice again.

— *Haa…* I told you that you can ignore it.

It was my first time hearing him sound kind of angry.

“I’m sorry, but… just now…” I mumbled.

Logically, the situation was hard to accept.

How come he told me to ignore it?

What exactly did he want me to do?

I was bothered by the unfamiliar way of communication.

— This won't work.

"Pardon?" I asked.

— I'm sure I told you not to doubt me… I told you not to think too much about it and to… prioritize my orders…

"I'm sorry. What should I—"

— No. If you're going to behave like this, things are going to become harder…

"…"

— *Whoo…* why is he doubting so much? He should just do as he's told. This fool is more disappointing than I thought.

"Excuse me? Mr. Lee Ki-Young? What did you—"

— It's nothing. Then… the first thing I need to do is help you trust me. How about a simple test?

"When you say a test…" I asked.

— What do you see in front of you?

I looked forward and saw two groups fighting each other. Swords and spears were clashing before me, and I heard the screams of both humans and monsters. I was witnessing a war—a battlefield was right in front of me.

— Can you start heading that way?

“What?”

— Close your eyes and walk.

“…”

— I know my request is kind of strange, but this is important to me. I want to trust you as well, Mr. William. We don’t have time for me to explain every little detail. So… it starts now. Can you do that?

“Yes, I’ll try it,” I replied.

He was right; there was no time for me to hesitate, so I closed my eyes.

I couldn’t see anything, but the noises around me had gotten louder.

“Push forward!”

“*Screeeeeech!*”

“Barrier! Where are the priests?”

“We have received an order! Move! Let’s move!”

“What about the front line, sir?!”

“It’s an order! Move!”

“*Grrrrr.*”

— Don’t stop and keep walking.

I heard a *squelch,* and with a *fwoosh*, it felt like something sticky landed on my face.

The sound I heard in the distance was now right next to me. Being surrounded by cries, shouts, and wailing was anything but pleasant. Actually, the word “fear” would be more fitting to describe my current feelings.

How could I not feel fear when I was unarmed in the middle of the battlefield?

I recalled Mr. Lee Ki-Young's actions during the mock battle, but this was different. Back then, he was making sure of the familiar terrain, but now, I was standing on a battlefield full of unknown variables.

Despite the hint of uncertainty, I didn't open my eyes because I trusted him, so I took a deep breath and continued walking.

"You bastards!"

"*Grrrrr.*"

"Blessing of the Sea!"

And then.

— Open your eyes.

I heard his voice again. I opened my eyes slowly and saw a giant monster opening its mouth to swallow me whole. However, I didn't move because he hadn't ordered me to move.

Boom!

I saw a giant pushing the monster away with its shield.

"What the hell?"

"…"

"Why are you just standing there? Do you want to die, William?!"

"Henry?" I asked.

'Is this… really possible?'

“Good timing, William. Do something about this place,” Henry said.

“No, Henry. That wasn’t the order I received,” I told him.

“…”

“…”

“*Ah*, really? Then I’ll see you later,” Henry said.

My words were absurd, but Henry simply lowered his head without questioning it. It seemed like he trusted Commander Lee Ki-Young enough that he didn’t question his command about me taking a stroll through the battlefield.

It was understandable, as Henry had been seeing many interesting scenes since the start of the battle.

Doubt turned into certainty, and certainty turned into loyalty.

‘Wh-What is this?’

I couldn’t understand it.

The things that were happening were things I just couldn’t understand with common sense. I walked as he instructed, and I felt someone unleashing a massive spell again, but I still walked without stopping.

My body reacted to it at first, but I knew there was no need for me to react.

As expected, the demons’ attacks missed me.

The unpleasant clumps of poison that the demons spewed missed me as well.

The enemies’ attacks couldn’t land on me at all. They were all blocked by debris from a crumbling temple, a magic barrier, and the vanguards.

'What the hell… is going on? What… kind of magic is this?'

It was to the point that I thought he possessed some kind of strange type of unique ability. Perhaps it was a type of holy power I couldn't see or feel. Perhaps he had some kind of supernatural power. I felt like that was why their attacks couldn't land on me.

Obviously, I knew that wasn't the case.

However, all I could think about was his voice.

— Do you trust me now?

"No, it's not that… I doubted you… Mr. Lee Ki-Young…" I answered.

— I'm glad. Then, can we get started now?

"Yes," I replied.

— The coordinates…

"I think… I see the path. Is what I'm seeing right now… a path?" I asked.

-…

"I'm sorry. I spoke out of place," I said immediately.

— It's fine. I was just surprised… You seem to have a sharper eye than I thought.

"So…"

— Yes, what you're seeing now is a path. I'll just adjust the variables, so all you need to do is follow the path.

"Okay."

I saw a path, and I could clearly see where I needed to go.

“Push!”

“*Kyaaaaaaaaaaah!*”

The warriors were creating a path by pushing back the monsters with their shields. A powerful spell wiped out the monster before me, and the temple next to it collapsed, which opened up a path.

The voice in my head confirmed that the path I was taking was the right path.

My feet gradually moved faster, and the scenery around me peeled away.

For some reason, my steps felt light, and it felt like only Lee Ki-Young and I were the only ones who existed on the battlefield. At some point, I stopped hearing the noises around me. Actually, it was more accurate to say that I could no longer hear it.

That was because I couldn’t focus on anything else other than his voice…

I couldn’t hear my footsteps, my sword, and the enemies’ heads flying into the skies.

I saw the enemy casting spells, but there was no need for me to stop or dodge their attacks.

As expected, an ally cast a protection-type spell. There was only one thing I needed to do—reach the destination as fast as possible, so I swung my sword until I reached the end of the path.

— Move.

“Okay.”

— I think you should head inside. I see troops who need help.

“Okay.”

I was running out of breath, but it was fun. I felt confident that I could carry out whatever he wanted. It was like I had become a god on the battlefield. I was definitely smiling right now. I couldn't remember when was the last time I smiled like this, but I was smiling like a fool.

— You see it now, right?

"I do," I answered.

— You can become stronger, Mr. William.

"I see," I said.

— At least, that's what I feel. You're perceptive, and I'm also happy to know that you're learning new things.

"Thank you," I said.

After wiping off the blood on my sword, I looked up and saw a massive, grotesque monster.

[How amusing. You ignorant mortal.]

"…"

[You dare try to challenge Chalkis of Flesh and Blood, you ignorant fool?]

As I expected from a high-ranking demon, it was arrogant. It was like the demon wasn't expecting to lose to a human. I also wasn't expecting to take him down with one attack, but…

'It's possible with Mr. Lee Ki-Young.'

The demon that once looked massive now looked small in my eyes.

[I'll kill you, you mortal. You should feel grateful to meet your end at the hands of Chalkis of the 21st Legion, led by the Monarch of Sunset.]

I raised my sword again, and the demon suddenly fell to the ground with its head first. It happened so suddenly that I couldn't react to it. Actually, I was sure everyone reacted the same way.

How would one react upon seeing someone slamming head first on the ground?

"This is…" I mumbled.

The demon was cowering and trembling.

It was like it couldn't look forward.

However, as soon as the demon's head struck the ground, I felt that something strange was going on.

I was being affected by something. I became tense, and I couldn't move at all. It felt like I couldn't breathe. Right when my breath grew more labored, the demon talked once more.

[M-Monarch of Sunset…]

"M-Mr. Lee Ki-Young," I mumbled.

[M-M-Monarch of Sunset… w-what brings someone of your caliber… to seek out a humble servant like myself?]

"This… I…" I said.

— It's okay, Mr. William. The Commander of the 21st Legion cannot make a move out of the castle. I think the demon is receiving a message from him.

"I see," I said.

[Yes. R-right now… the vermin of Rohen… are in the city I'm in… I'm sorry. I have committed a grave sin, Monarch of Sunset. Please… show me mercy…]

"…"

[D-Did you say the head of the human in front of me?]

"…"

[Y-Yes… I-I'll risk everything I have and offer you what you want, Monarch of Sunset. I'll… I'll bring it to you no matter what. So…]

Chalkis of Flesh and Blood trembled violently. It was like the demon was absorbing the ashen sunset in the sky. The demon was growing bigger, making it look even more grotesque than before.

I immediately realized that its appearance wasn't the only thing that changed.

[The Monarch of Sunset… is—*kyaaahhhh*~ He has bestowed! Pooower! Upon me!]

"…"

[I am Chalkis of Flesh and Blood! I am! Chalkis of Flesh and Blood! *Kekekekeke!*]

Its overwhelming energy paralyzed me.

And that was when I heard *his* voice again.

— Mr. William, you can win.

He sounded confident.

CHAPTER 1156
OPERATION: DAWN (5)

"Mr. William, you can win," I[1] said.

"…"

"…"

'Damn it. I don't think he can win.'

I didn't think it would level up this much…

"Believe in yourself," I added.

'I don't think he should trust himself too much… He should be worried about himself just a little bit… '

"…"

"…" For a moment, the thought of withdrawing William and the troops popped up in my head.

'This is ridiculous. It's completely ridiculous.'

The growth of Flower Ki-Young, who had lost his comrade, the small conflict that occurred between the genius commander and Rohen's allied forces, a departure ceremony that inspired everyone to dream of a hopeful future…

The clash against the Demon Legion, the valiant efforts of the heroes, and the tear-jerking side stories of the extras were infused on this battlefield…

We had come too far to turn tail and run, so accepting defeat now would be humiliating.

Actually, that wasn't the issue. A single misstep in our hopeful stride could cause Rohen the opportunity to rise again. I could tell what kind of situation we were in based on the expressions of people on the battlefield.

'Damn it.'

'These guys think they won't lose.'

The bigger the expectations, the bigger the disappointment, and their expectations were sky high.

"The saint of Flower and Fertility is with us! Hang in there, everyone!"

"Yes, Captain!"

"Yes, Captain!!!"

Their faces were filled with joy.

"Push forward! Just a little more! There's not much left! You idiots!"

"He's right. There's just one more step left, Kathy."

"I knew we could do it! Shit! I knew it!"

"This is Rohen, you demon bastards!"

They seemed to believe that we still had a chance to live—that mankind had yet to be defeated. Before the departure ceremony, they looked hopeless, but now, they looked as if defeat wasn't an option.

Even the operation name they had chosen as their slogan was "Dawn," so how could I retreat when the spark of hope was just starting to transform into the flames of hope?

'I have to keep the flames of hope alive, even if it means everyone is going to die.'

'Will has to push through even if his body ends up falling apart. Even if he becomes a wreck after all this.'

"You can win, Mr. William," I said again.

— Okay, Mr. Lee Ki-Young.

The bleeding would hurt a bit, and if Will was enough to keep the flames of hope alive, then it would be a fair trade.

We weren't just taking care of the one in charge of this region; we were facing Chalkis of Flesh and Gore, a being that was granted power by the Monarch of Sunset.

When looking at Chalkis' state, it was safe to assume that Kim Hyun-Sung also made an impulsive decision, paying the heavy price with blood.

'Whether in the past or now, impulsively consuming things remains unchanged.'

While profits came from the summoning incidents, the mainstream event, and the humans, the price that had to be paid was pretty high as well. There was a reason why the remaining two demon lords didn't run rampant like Kim Hyun-Sung.

The cost of maintaining the 21st Legion was significant, and there was no need for me to mention the cost of maintaining the Monarch of Sunset.

This was similar to the time when Belial couldn't move during the 27th Legion incident. If a god or a demon descended upon the continent using a summoning ritual, they would be bound by the universal rule that every single move they made would come with a massive cost.

For someone as influential as Kim Hyun-Sung, the system would impose taxes on him. Every move that would influence required paying a certain price. If I were the Commander of the 21st Legion, I would focus on strengthening the foundation, but from our Hyun-Sung's perspective, he

couldn't afford to do that right now…

'He should've at least strengthened the foundation before making a move.'

In addition to irresponsibly expanding the Ashen Sunset Region, he also invaded another demon lord's territory, almost leading to a war.

He was making such an aggressive investment that even ten hearts wouldn't be enough to handle it.

There was no guarantee that he would a war against a demon lord, nor was there any guarantee that his investment would produce results.

There wasn't enough time to deal with these two issues, but he had invested a significant amount of money into some useless fool while ignoring taxes, so funnily enough, the situation was actually in my favor.

[The Monarch of Sunset, *hehehe!* Experience… his greatness! You foolish mortals! *Kekekekekeke!*]

'This asshole has gone completely crazy.'

[The Monarch of Sunset! He's watching over me! Meee! He's watching over me! *Kekekeke!*]

'Why does it keep… giggling like that?'

[The Monarch of Sunset! He's watching over… Chalkis of Flesh and Gore!!!]

The problem was that processing the scene before me was difficult.

Kim Hyun-Sung had to have realized that Will was the central pillar of the continent because he granted that flesh and gore or whatever above-average powers.

Its body became massive; its strength and magic increased significantly along with its overall stats. Its grotesque appearance turned even more

grotesque, and it seemed like it had unlocked a unique habit.

I was sure it was just an ordinary high-ranking demon, but right now…

'Donovan?'

Donovan…

He was the weakest member of the Four Heavenly Kings of the 27th Legion. This monster seemed a little stronger than Donova, who had sacrificed his life for his friend.

At the time, Kim Hyun-Sung, who experienced his first awakening, was able to take him down with his newly acquired skill, Sunset Slash, but William had nothing like that just yet. Still…

"Our opponent is unstable," I said.

— I agree. It looks unstable.

"It was granted power it can't use. Its mind has been ruined, and it's highly likely that its body is also breaking apart. It still hasn't adapted to its power…" I said.

— I agree.

[I'll tear you to pieces! You dirty pests! *Kekekeke!*]

Chalkis swung its fist wildly, as it was drunk on its new power.

However, Chalkis' movements didn't look like that in the eyes of an ordinary player.

It had overwhelming power and unimaginable speed and range. To make matters worse, the blood and flesh splattering from its giant claws melted whatever it touched.

Liquid-based attacks were some of the trickiest attacks a swordsman could ever deal with, but *only* if I weren't here.

Since I had to convey my intentions faster than I could with words, I sent an escape route through a quest.

[You look like a rat trying to run away! *Keke! Kekekeke!* Fear me and die!]

I also provided an attack route. Since the size of its body had increased, he had more angles that he could use to attack the monster.

[It tickles! You're tickling me! Is this… Is this! The power of the Monarch of Sunset?!]

"I think you should be careful of the flesh that keeps falling off it each time you attack it," I warned him.

— Yes, I'm aware of that, Mr. Lee Ki-Young.

"I have a feeling this is going to be a long fight," I said.

— Understood.

'Th-This will work.'

Chalkis was dumber than I thought, which was why he played the role of a dog guarding its house. After absorbing the Ashen Sunset's power, it became even more of an idiot.

It swung its arm randomly because it was drunk on its power, and its combat pattern was simple. It would either throw itself to crush its opponent or throw its insides around, which was just barbaric.

The acid pouring over such a wide area seemed disastrous, but with eyes sharp enough to see the openings, avoiding the acid rain was a piece of cake.

I believed Kim Hyun-Sung was even aware of what Chalkis was doing, but I

was sure he realized that he had made a mistake.

'See, Hyun-Sung. You need to do research before investing. You shouldn't let your emotions control your investments.'

[I'll crush you! I'm… Chalkis of Flesh and Gore! Chalkis of Flesh and Gore!]

It had to have thought that its attack would work if it increased its range a bit because it started growing. Its attack, resembling a tsunami of blood and organs, loomed over William.

However, the fact that it became wider meant that it became thinner.

[The Monarch of Sunset is… trusting… me.]

"You're strong enough to pierce it," I said.

I was certain of it this time, as thrust attacks were William's specialty. He got into the stance of the sword technique he was most confident in, and he stomped forward before unsheathing his sword.

It looked slow, but he moved so fast that it looked like it happened in an instant.

Mana enveloped him, making him look like he became one with the sword. He broke through the wave of blood and organs. At first, I thought his skin would melt, but even if that were the case, William's move was worthy of that exchange.

Boom!

A fissure appeared in the tidal wave of gore, and Will jumped out from the other side.

Depending on its presentation, this scene could look really cool, but Will couldn't care less about such a sight, so he didn't even strike a pose. After taking a stance with his sword, he slashed through the crimson thorns that

appeared out of nowhere.

[You're tickling me. You're tickling me… I'm… Chalkis… of flesh and gore… you vermin!]

"You can win," I repeated.

— Yes, I know.

"Believe in yourself a little bit more," I told him.

- Okay.

'But I don't think your firepower is enough to unleash the finishing blow. It's okay. We can just overwhelm them with numbers.'

It had been a long time since Chalkis and William started fighting, and the battlefield was constantly shifting. Unlike William and Chalkis, the competent Flower Ki-Young was gradually taking over the Saint Bell battlefield.

"Show those demons that Rohen has yet to be defeated."

"The Saint of Flower and Fertility is watching over us!"

'Don't say things Chalkis would say.'

"O light! O light!"

I heard priests casting purification spells, and I was doing the same.

Once in Flower form, I unleashed my holy power to push away the Ashen Sunset. My appearance gave everyone a boost. As expected, the priests were shouting out their spells, and pillars of light started rising all over the temple.

"It's the light! The light is protecting us!"

The excited GENIUSES roared at the sight. The incompetent fools were so loud that I thought my eardrums would burst. I was sure everyone would react the same way at the sight before us.

The pillars of light that appeared everywhere were gradually pushing away the Ashen Sunset. We were simply creating a safe zone, but the sight of the gloomy sunrise clearing the Ashen Sunset was enough to give hope to everyone here.

"This is… dawn," Kathy mumbled.

"Hope starts here, Kathy," Aleria said.

"Yeah, I see it as well, Aleria," Kathy replied.

"I'm sure this place will go down in history as the place where the lost light was rekindled," Aleria remarked.

Chalkis was no longer focused on William. Instead, it was looking at me. Moments later, it spoke in a voice that sounded completely different from earlier.

It seemed Kim Hyun-Sung had borrowed its body to speak to me, but…

[You.]

'Hyun-Sung? Did you see it from far away? How are you doing that? You know how to do that?'

[You're not Mr. Ki-Young.]

'Huh?'

"…"

[…]

‘What is he… talking about?’

[Who… are you?]

“…”

[Who are you… and why do you look like Mr. Ki-Young?]

I was so stunned by the unexpected nonsense that I couldn’t focus for a moment.

[Who. Are you?]

“…”

[…Where’s the real Mr. Ki-Young?]

---

1. Lee Ki-Young’s POV ☜

CHAPTER 1157
SUSPICION (1)

[…Where's the real Mr. Ki-Young?]

'Has he gone insane?'

[…Answer me. Where's the real Mr. Ki-Young?]

'Are you so overwhelmed by stress that you've completely lost sight of everything?'

[Answer me!!! You jerk!]

Kim Hyun-Sung looked like he had gone completely insane, as he was shouting while glaring at me. I thought it was ridiculous. On top of that, Chalkis showed no signs of concern. Chalkis was already destined to become a lost soul, but seeing it perish without a proper farewell made it hard not to feel any sympathy toward it.

It'd be nice if the being had, at least, said a cliched line that villains would say in their final moments, but Kim Hyun-Sung showed no signs of giving back control.

[Where's the real Mr. Ki-Young! You jeeeeerk!!!]

'What? Jerk?'

'Are you crazy? Is it because I'm in my Flower Ki-Young form right now? Haven't you seen it before when I was attending the Academy?'

'I did evolve since then, but how could you not recognize me? I can't forgive you. If you keep acting like this, I'll have no choice but to get upset.'

I was sure that it wasn't because of my appearance, but I canceled my Flower Ki-Young form just in case. As the Saint of Flower and Fertility who had just performed a miracle, I took a deep breath to appear exhausted.

'Recognize me now?'

I thought his attitude would change, but…

[Where's Mr. Ki-Young… Where is he?! Where's Mr. Ki-Young?! I asked you where he is!!! You jerk!!! Who… are you… Who the hell are you?! Why do you look like him…]

'What the hell is wrong with him?'

There was something terrifying about the way he screamed with his voice that had split into two, making him sound like he had lost his mind. I could probably have laughed it off if he had said all those things with his true face, but the way he screamed with that grotesque face was terrifying.

He was also so loud that I felt like my eardrums would burst.

Confronting an insane and malevolent being head-on was anything but pleasant. I couldn't say anything because people were watching, and he also wasn't sane enough to hold a conversation.

Kim Hyun-Sung's faith was *that* blindly unwavering. He was acting as if I really wasn't Lee Ki-Young. He was just rejecting me without a single ounce of doubt.

'What the hell… Don't act like this all of a sudden. Seriously.'

[Tell me now!!! Right now!!!]

To make things worse, he was dragging the monster's massive form toward me. Its body was being affected by the pillars of light that had manifested everywhere in Saint Bell, but the large monster moved as if those lights didn't matter.

Despite the fact that Chalkis' flesh kept falling off…

[Who are you?! Who the hell are you?! Damn it!!! What the hell did you do to Mr. Ki-Young?!]

I immediately realized that something was wrong because he was reacting so violently. Obviously, it was weird that Kim Hyun-Sung couldn't recognize me. To make things worse, he was watching me with his own eyes before he was summoned here.

'Did something go wrong during the summoning ceremony?'

Had he lost some of his memories because he rushed to get here? Or was he that anxious that he was delirious? Was he finally breaking down mentally?

Could it be that he was suffering from schizophrenia?

'If those aren't the case… '

Perhaps he wasn't the real Kim Hyun-Sung.

"…"

"…"

It was getting complicated, but there had to be an explanation behind this.

'No. Th-That's impossible.'

It was too unrealistic to say that he was Kim Hyun-Sung from the Dummy World.

He didn't know anything about the dummy world, and he definitely didn't have the ability to create a high-quality homunculus. Even if he got someone's help, brought out the data, and materialized a physical body, it wouldn't make sense for him to fight the Commander of the 21st Legion.

Saying that Dummy Kim Hyun-Sung had obtained a body and took down Marthym, the Commander of the 21st Legion, was even more absurd than saying that I defeated Bahamut using sword techniques.

'What's wrong with you? Seriously, what's wrong… '

[You… jerk… Give me back… Mr. Ki-Young… Give him… baaaaaaack!]

I saw him dragging the unstable body toward the command center. Obviously, he became a huge target, so he was exposed to the players' spells and attacks, but he didn't seem to care about those attacks.

[Give him… back…]

'Is this a horror movie… or something… '

Everyone looked at Chalkis of Flesh and Gore with disgust. Despite not being able to move anymore, it wriggled with its hand stretched out.

It was unintentional, but fear was written on the faces of Rohen's expedition group. Although they had succeeded in recapturing Saint Bell and created a safe zone, they had also realized the true strength of the 21st Legion.

They had also realized just how far the members of the 21st Legion could push themselves and the fact that they could transform into fanatical, frenzied beings.

[…Where… is… he… Ki… Young…]

'Stop it. You're really scary, man.'

[Ki… Young… where…]

'…'

[I won't… forgive… you… Give… him… back…]

‘…’

[…Never…]

‘…’

[Give… him… back… Mr… Ki-Young…]

He remained silent, but an eerie silence persisted in Saint Bell. Everyone had to be really exhausted because I couldn’t even hear their cheers. Everyone just looked at each other, and I could tell they couldn’t bring themselves to be joyful.

I told myself that I needed to say something, but it was hard to say something.

‘Shit. What is this… What the hell is this… ‘

I was having a hard time assessing this confusing situation.

Thankfully, there was someone who could turn this situation around. He had to have noticed how unstable I was because Will nodded and headed toward the center.

After cutting off Chalkis’ head, he held up its head and declared, “Raise your head, heroes! We’ve won!”

“…”

“From now on, Rohen will be undefeated. Rohen’s sun will rise over Saint Bell,” he continued.

After he made his incomprehensible speech, people cheered so loudly that I thought I was going to go deaf, but of course, I was happy that we won.

‘How come he doesn’t recognize me? What went wrong?’

“*Ahhhhhhhhhhh!*”

‘This is such a ridiculous situation.’

“I knew we’d win! Shit!”

‘What the hell, Kim Hyun-Sung? What happened to you… ‘

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young, are you okay?” William asked.

“I… I… Yes… I just need some time…” I mumbled.

“Just now—”

“I’m sorry, but can we talk tomorrow? I-I want to rest right now,” I interrupted him.

“…”

My head was throbbing because the situation had strayed from the intended path. I would have been able to keep my composure had it just been an expected event, but what had happened was clearly different.

“…”

‘What’s the problem?’

How come he couldn’t recognize me? Obviously, I had to find the answer to that question. Many different thoughts popped into my head. I couldn’t help but think that there was something wrong with Kim Hyun-Sung as well as what had happened during the summoning ceremony.

I was also wondering about whom he got into a contract with and if he ended up getting scammed. I also wondered if the contract was distorted while he was crossing over to Rohen and if that was the reason why he couldn’t recognize me.

What happened to the Regressor Instruction Manual?

I had to look into the details, as diagnosing Kim Hyun-Sung was extremely important. If there was nothing wrong with him, there would be something wrong with me.

While crossing over to Rohen, perhaps something about Kim Hyun-Sung had changed upon getting nerfed, but I didn't think that would cause him such confusion.

'He seems really certain.'

Despite knowing that a simple apology wouldn't be enough if he were to make a mistake, he still muttered unforgivable nonsense. I could still remember him threatening me.

If there had been even the slightest suspicion, he wouldn't have acted that way.

'There weren't any issues until he came here. He noticed something amiss upon seeing me with his own eyes.'

Just then, an unpleasant possibility popped up in my head.

"Noona."

—…

"Noona."

— What? I'm busy.

"Is it possible for one's body or soul to experience abnormalities while being summoned to Rohen?"

— That's a really random question. Stop saying ridiculous things and get back to work. *Ah!* Is everything over on your side? You called me because

everything in Saint Bell is over, right?

"No, I'm not trying to be ridiculous. I'm asking a serious question. I think the situation is pretty absurd… but I don't know if Hyun-Sung recognizes me."

— Nonsense…

"It's true."

— There's no way he'd act like that. He has no reason to dig his own grave.

"…"

"What if he became crazy because he has been living every day with anxiety? What if his mental illness finally got to him? It's possible because he's been suffering from something like paranoia.

"Something is threatening Lee Ki-Young. I'm sure he thinks of that dozens of times a day. He has been suppressing it for too long. I knew he was going to turn out like this someday."

—…

— The bottled-up emotions finally exploded?

"You don't get it. It's not like that. Take this seriously, noona. I think something happened while he was summoned to Rohen. It's either Kim Hyun-Sung or me, but I'm sure there's something wrong with either of us. I want to know how Kim Hyun-Sung ended up here. Do you know anything about it?"

—…

"…"

— *Haa…*

"…"

— I told you that I don't know the details. If Kim Hyun-Sung shared that information with me, do you really think I'll come here in Domi's body? I would have dragged the entire legion here. Anyway, I'll take it seriously since you said it's a serious issue. I don't think there were any issues.

"…"

— We arrived here legally. I can confidently say that the Commander of the 21st Legion won't have any issues with his memories or losing himself when descending into the mortal realm.

— If you look through the past cases, you won't find anything like it. Do you remember Belial, whom Jin had summoned in Laios? Back then, only half of him was summoned, but everything else about him was fine. You think there's something wrong with Kim Hyun-Sung when he was summoned with an entire army?

"…"

— His visa is a bit different, but it's the same for the Outer Gods. If anything, there might be something wrong with his memories, but having trouble recognizing a specific person… is a really ridiculous theory. You think the system will do something like that recklessly? In addition, the rules of Rohen aren't as strict as on our continent.

"What do you think about my situation?"

— I'm not sure. No matter how much I think about it, I don't think there should be any problems… I'm the one who went through a more complicated process to enter. I don't know what you're worried about… *haa*… but I'll look into it. Come to think of it, it's strange that out of everyone, Kim Hyun-Sung is the one who doesn't recognize you…

"What do you think, noona? Did anything about me change?"

— You're still the same.

Something felt off. I had been overlooking it, as I hadn't noticed it until now.

However, I couldn't help but feel that something was off while I was talking to Lee Ji-Hye.

— You're still the same.

It was kind of a strange question, but I had to say it.

"But noona…"

— What is it?

"This question may sound kind of strange… but there's something I want to ask."

— *Geez…*

"Noona."

—…

"When I arrived here…"

—…

"How come you stopped calling me oppa?"

—…

I wasn't certain, but maybe *I* was the dummy. That thought popped into my head.

CHAPTER 1158
SUSPICION (2)

The first thought that popped into my mind after asking an unusual question was that I had made a huge mistake.

—…

“…”

I asked a question that was sensitive to both of us without much thought.

‘Shit.’

If I were Lee Ki-Young, it wouldn’t matter. Lee Ki-Young would jokingly say that he was upset or that he was suspicious of her actions, but it was different for Dummy Ki-Young.

Dummy Ki-Young couldn’t be asking such questions.

It was the worst move at the wrong time.

‘How is my breathing? Is it obvious that I’m flustered? No, I shouldn’t have started it like that.’

Lee Ji-Hye had to have noticed it the moment I told her that Kim Hyun-Sung couldn’t recognize me. I ought to have felt her out while wearing the mask of ignorance. Anyone who heard me could tell that I was doubting something, so of course, she would notice that something was off.

Even if I were to approach it carefully, she would still catch on.

‘Damn it, damn it, damn it… ‘

Basically, I was advertising that I was a dummy, and the deathly silence was telling me the answer. I was sure she felt that something was off, and right now, she was probably thinking about whether to press the reset button or not.

Of course, *if* I was really a dummy.

'It's more like I had no other choice rather than a mistake.'

In my head, Lee Ji-Hye was still Ji-Hye noona. Editing the memories in my head was impossible. She was just Ji-Hye noona, not the creator of Dummy Ki-Young, and the Demon King of Sunset wasn't an enemy but the regressor whom I had created.

It was absurd, but the doubts made me feel bad.

The truth that Lee Ji-Hye and Kim Hyun-Sung couldn't recognize me made me feel a throbbing headache. This emotion was unfamiliar, but I could feel myself yearning for a bond.

Despite trying not to think about it, the anxiety wouldn't go away. The thought of possibly getting abandoned filled my head. The question of what I ought to do if I wasn't the real Lee Ki-Young wouldn't go away.

'Shit… '

"…"

'What… kind of ridiculous situation is this?'

That psychopathic jerk…

— So you're curious about that?

"…"

— *Ah*, there's no special reason behind it. I just thought you didn't like it,

oppa. Do you want me to call you Oppa from now on? *Geez*… you're the one who complained before about how you were younger than me and didn't want me to call you oppa.

— You're a strange one. Also, you said you're twenty-three years old there. I shouldn't call you Oppa when you're *that* young.

'Did she catch on?'

I had no idea what she had caught on to, but I felt that something was off based on her tone of voice.

"It's fine… I just thought something was strange, but it's nothing important. Even I thought it was a strange question, noona. Don't worry about it."

— You're more timid than you seem. Why are you curious about something so ridiculous? If I tell you something, just accept it and move on. Don't ask questions like that and make me feel flustered. Or… did you think that… I no longer liked you? Did that worry you that much?

"No…"

— Did you feel distant over something as trivial as that? This is pretty nice. We should play hard to get from time to time. Don't you agree?

"It's nothing like that. I asked because I was simply curious. I thought you had a change of heart because you're kind of—"

— I didn't have a change of heart. The thought of having to clean up after you again made me feel angry for a moment. That's it. You know that I get cranky when I'm stressed. It's nothing new… but if you got hurt, then I'm sorry.

"No, I'm the one who feels bad. Also, I'll clean up my own mess, noona. You don't have to worry about it too much."

— That's a completely different thing. If there's anything you need, you need to tell me. It's not that I don't trust you, but I have my own things to prepare.

"Okay."

— Are you done asking your strange questions? Are you sure… there's nothing else?

"…"

— So, there are no more problems, right? I'll look into the issue with Kim Hyun-Sung. Are you sure there isn't anything else?

'Is this what I think it is?'

Was she just trying to brush it off as if there weren't anything wrong? Was she telling me to accept it? She was hinting that we ought to skip that question and forget about my suspicions.

"Yeah, you should rest, noona."

— You too. If you have any other questions, contact me right away and don't keep it in. You understand… what I'm saying, right?

"…"

Perhaps I was too fixated on the possibility that I was Dummy Ki-Young, but it felt like she was telling me to ignore what I had realized and continue my work. However, I wasn't sure whether it was related to the possibility of how I could be a dummy.

It was highly likely that Lee Ji-Hye also had no idea what I was thinking. It was possible that we were having different thoughts despite being in the same situation.

Naturally, exploring various possibilities would come after confirming the hypothesis, and the hypothesis was that I could be Dummy Ki-Young.

'No matter what anyone says, there's no way Kim Hyun-Sung won't recognize me.'

Unless Lee Ki-Young had decided to prank Kim Hyun-Sung before crossing over.

Of course, rather than finding a reason to prank Kim Hyun-Sung, it was easier to figure out why Dummy Ki-Young was sent to Rohen.

'Because of the lack of certainty.'

There were likely many factors that made it difficult to truly commit to the Rohen expedition. Actually, that wasn't it. Even I thought there were many risks and uncertainties in this expedition.

The higher-ups were fighting amongst each other and couldn't come to an agreement, and a few insignificant beings couldn't care less about the fate of the continent. The ones who were thinking straight were just too caught up in fighting off poverty.

And what about the plan to make Woo Hyo-Yeol the regressor?

Not only was it one-sided, but it also lacked practicality. There wasn't a solid plan, either. If I were an investor, I would never invest in Rohen.

Unless I was taking full control and reforming it, it wasn't worth handling.

Yeah, this was the right decision. I was sure he had taken this path. Rather than taking it seriously from the start, he had to have decided to test it out first. If it wasn't working, then he'd just take his hands off it.

'It wasn't Lee Ki-Young who got into a contract with Jupiter.'

To be exact, it was Dummy Ki-Young who got into a contract with Jupiter.

The real Ki-Young had no obligation to take responsibility or keep the promise that was made through the contract. It'd be better to say that he created a way out by taking the contract he had made with Chanelia Hermes and renewing it to a higher-level contract with Jupiter.

I couldn't overlook the possibility of him having a connection with Jupiter, but if I were in his shoes, I would escape using Dummy Ki-Young, as there was no way the real Ki-Young would trust Jupiter.

He would probably use Kim Hyun-Sung to take over Rohen, use the remaining two demon lords, or demand a one-sided contract at the critical juncture. Anyway, he had countless ways and tools to…

'To oppress Rohen.'

The system and the higher-ups couldn't interfere with the step-by-step process that would allow him to take over Rohen the backdoor. It was highly likely that he was repeating the same thing even at this moment.

It was strange that Jupiter's group couldn't feel anything strange about the homunculus, but when I recalled how incompetent they were, I realized that it wasn't all that strange.

The Outer children hadn't noticed anything strange about me. It wasn't all of them, but it was likely that they had some people helping them.

Only Lee Ji-Hye and Kim Hyun-Sung noticed that I was strange.

They noticed that something was off because of my soul, not my body.

The homunculus was *that* perfect. Of course, in order to maintain its quality so that it would be extremely close to the real thing, he had to make some sacrifices, such as the lifespan and physical functions.

If it was a body meant to be used and discarded in just a short period of time, it was possible to maintain the same quality as the original.

I wanted to check my body, but this body had no alchemy skills that would allow me to examine it closely.

'Did he intentionally stop me from performing alchemy?'

I couldn't say that the chances were low. In that case…

'What about Jung Ha-Yan?'

I wonder what Ha-Yan thought about me.

If Lee Ji-Hye and Kim Hyun-Sung had caught on, then perhaps Jung Ha-Yan…

'Perhaps she has caught on as well.'

Even if that wasn't the case, then she had to have gotten in contact with the real Ki-Young. She was probably looking at me the same way she would look at her favorite doll.

I sensed someone and turned my head to find her staring at me.

I had no idea when she arrived behind me.

"O-O-Oppa," Jung Ha-Yan said.

"…"

"I-I-Is… something wrong?" she asked.

"No, I just—"

"Y-Y-You're not sick, are you?" Jung Ha-Yan interrupted me.

Jung Ha-Yan's gaze seemed off.

'Has she always looked like that?'

Had she always been like that in my memories? I was talking about her gaze. I wasn't sure.

"I want to be alone… Is that okay?" I asked.

"*Ah!* S-Sure. I-I'll wait for you outside," Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

I heard a *creak*, but the door was still open.

I saw Jung Ha-Yan watching me through the narrow gap in the door.

"…"

Jung Ha-Yan's gaze shifted. I couldn't see her face clearly, but I was sure that she was giggling.

"…"

"…"

"Ha-Yan," I called out.

"*He… hehe…"* Jung Ha-Yan giggled.

"…"

"…"

"I-I-I got caught," Jung Ha-Yan said.

I was getting nervous. The situations I didn't even want to think about kept on happening. I wanted to believe that it was all in my imagination, but it felt like I was being watched.

Perhaps Lee Ki-Young was also…

'Perhaps he's watching me as well.'

'Or could it be one of the GENIUSES? Who is it? Abyss? Golden Throne? Guardian? Gatekeeper? Boy? If they're watching, how much can they influence me? Can they reset me, or do they have some kind of influence on me?'

At the very least, they had to have prepared a safety measure, so they definitely had a way of controlling a dummy. If they felt like they needed to move me in the direction they wanted, they could definitely do that by

interfering with my subconscious.

'Are they reading my mind as well?'

'Are they aware of the fact that I discovered that I'm a dummy?'

'If they're aware, how come they're not doing anything?'

Perhaps it didn't matter whether I had realized it or not.

Perhaps the only thing they cared about was that I was playing my role properly.

Lee Ji-Hye seemed to be acting that way as well.

"Whatever you're suspicious of or question, just stay committed to your role…"

"…"

"Is what you guys are saying, right?" I mumbled.

"…" "You'll have no choice but to be committed. That's what you guys are thinking, right?" I questioned.

It was such a ridiculous and ruthless thought, but I didn't think it was strange.

'Those jerks don't think of dummies as people. They think of dummies as nothing but programs.'

Kim Hyun-Sung, Lee Ji-Hye, Jung Ha-Yan, Park Deok-Gu, Rafael, Han Sora, Hwang Jung-Yeon, Elena, Lee Chang-Ryeol, Yoo Ah-Young, Kim Ye-Ri, Ahn Ki-Mo, Park Lian, Belier, Alps, Kasugano Yuno, Oscar, Benigoa, Belial, Smith, Gen, Thronus, Dominions, and Cherubim…

If all these connections were made up…

If it felt like none of those memories were my actual experiences or memories…

If I ended up feeling suspicious that nothing was truly mine…

“Does that mean I’ll be forced to stay true to what I consider to be real?” I asked.

It felt like the Lee Ki-Young being reflected on the window was talking to me.

CHAPTER 1159
SUSPICION (3)

If I was the Dummy Ki-Young that I made, then that had to be the reason I had no memories of the Dummy World.

I tried to remember the Dummy World, including Dummy Hyun-Sung, but I couldn't remember everything.

In my eyes, those things felt like nothing more than a collection of programs, nothing more, nothing less. Of course, it was possible that an entirely new entity was created, but whether it was the former or latter, the result was the same.

It was all for the sake of isolating Flower Ki-Young in Rohen.

It was a way to remind him that this was all he had left.

'Crazy jerks.'

I imagined them discussing this while making pointless jokes, and it was so absurd that I had no idea what to say. They had created the perfect doll that couldn't rebel against them.

Even now, I felt like my hands and feet were tied.

Flower Ki-Young couldn't touch Kim Hyun-Sung, Jung Ha-Yan, and the others.

It was like they left open even the slightest possibility that I was the real Lee Ki-Young.

I couldn't completely rule out the possibility that I was the real Lee Ki-Young.

I had tricked myself before, after all. The fake Lee Ki-Young theory was less

plausible, but if it was necessary, then the real Ki-Young theory could be worth considering.

More importantly, I couldn't leave Rohen alone.

Even I think… that it was ridiculous to be in chains, but…

'Shit, shit, shit.'

I couldn't help but think that this was all I had.

It was surprising that I found myself becoming attached to the relationships I had formed in Rohen, which felt like a game-like place at first. I couldn't help but wonder if they had tampered with my emotions while designing me.

'I wouldn't have acted like this if I had nothing in the first place.'

I felt a sense of emptiness at the thought that the things I had obtained on this continent weren't mine. I was anxious that none of it was mine to begin with.

They were the ones responsible for creating this situation.

"Damn it…" I mumbled.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young," William called out.

"…"

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young?" William called out again.

"…"

"It's William. Can I come in?" William asked.

"…"

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young?" William said.

The door swung open. I turned and saw William looking at me with a worried gaze.

“Are… Are you okay?” William asked.

‘What do you mean, okay?’

“…”

“Are you okay?” William asked again.

I noticed his slightly frowning face. He looked shocked.

I finally realized how bad I looked right now.

William looked like he was trying to find the reason behind it. He was wondering why I had decided to lock myself in my room for hours. The way he hesitated with a slightly sorrowful face made him look kind of pathetic.

He was bad at comforting people, and it was proven by how he quietly cleaned up the room after examining my condition.

There were glass shards all over the place. At first, it seemed like the temple was in decent shape, but upon closer inspection, the room was pretty messy.

Theological texts were torn to pieces and scattered around, and there didn’t seem to be much left intact in the room. It was like someone had thrown a fit or went into a frenzy.

It was natural for him to be worried since I was spacing out in a place like this.

The timing was kind of awkward for me to greet him as if nothing was wrong, so I had no choice but to keep acting. I acted melancholic, and there seemed to be a story behind my sadness. I looked like I was heartbroken by something.

Despite that, William didn't rush into comforting me. He didn't ask why and simply did his job quietly.

Just as I was feeling uncomfortable beneath the awkward silence, he finally started talking, "Mr. Lee Ki-Young."

"…"

"I'm embarrassed to say this myself, but…" William paused.

"…"

"When I first arrived here, I didn't look like I do now," William continued.

"…"

"Of course, it's a story from a long time ago, but… I experienced failure a few times and have broken down several times. I lived a bit recklessly due to stress… and you may not believe me, but at one point… I struggled with alcohol addiction," William confessed.

'So he wasn't like this from the start. But no alcohol. That's dangerous.'

"Before becoming a player, Rohen was a really lonely place as a human from Earth. It's like I was thrown into the world alone. I didn't have friends I could confide in nor people who could provide mutual support," William added.

'Yeah, that's understandable.'

"It sounds cliche, but I changed after stumbling upon the Flower and Fertility Familia. It seems like nothing, but belonging somewhere is really important when overcoming this kind of environment. I'm talking about family," William said.

"…"

"I think of them as my family, and they also treat me like I'm family. I was

with them during those difficult and sad times, so I managed to overcome it.

“I was able to find my true self again, and thanks to them, I was able to dream about the future. What I liked the most was that I had people to share my happiness, sadness, and pain with,” William explained.

“…”

“I won’t ask you to share your story because everyone has their own reason for hiding things, but Mr. Lee Ki-Young. It’s important to share your sadness. I believe sharing your current emotions and the things you’re feeling is really important,” William advised.

“…”

“I don’t know… if I’m reading it right… but I think you’re struggling right now, Mr. Ki-Young,” William said.

“…”

“I wasn’t lying when I told you that you were a family member of the Flower and Fertility Familia,” William added.

‘Will, you… ‘

“I just wanted you to know the truth,” William said.

‘Don’t treat me with so much warmth. That makes me want to lean on you.’

Without realizing it, a tear escaped from me. I saw him slowly reaching his hand out toward me while thinking his persuasion worked. It was annoying, but I really think it kind of worked. Normally, I would just ignore it, but the choice of rejecting his hand didn’t pop into my head.

Without asking the reason behind all this, he was telling me that he would empathize with my sadness and that I was part of their family, so how could I ignore him?

However, I was sure this situation had sparked a suspicion in him.

He knew that Flower Ki-Young had many secrets, but he probably couldn't ignore Chalkis' words. He probably wanted to ask who the real Lee Ki-Young was and how I connected to the 21st Legion.

Despite the fact that the giant key, which could pierce the Demon King of Sunset, was on the line, he didn't try to get an answer from me by questioning me aggressively.

'I'd expect nothing less from Will.'

I couldn't help but acknowledge that he was being considerate.

"Everyone was alone at first, Mr. Ki-Young," William said.

Obviously, holding his hand was the right choice because acting *too* melodramatic wasn't a good look.

I also needed to deal with Saint Bell first.

"…"

"…"

"I-I can't tell you right now. Some things come to mind, but they're all fragmented images…" I told him.

"You don't have to tell me the things you're going through right now," William said.

"I… I… I don't know why I'm acting like this either, Mr. William. All I can say now… is to trust me," I said.

"I already told you that I trust you," William reminded me.

"*Ah…* right… you did… say that," I mumbled.

“You just need to focus on the things you can do right now, Mr. Ki-Young. No matter what happens or what comes up, the Flower and Fertility Familia will support you and will remain by your side,” William said.

‘Why are you trying so hard to make me feel moved?’

It was hard to decline when I was feeling weak. My mind was still a mess, but I had to stand up. Regardless of the situation, I still had a choice to make. It was impossible to deviate from the current course, and I knew that better than anyone.

“I know it’s a bit sudden, but… Mr. William, about Saint Bell…” I asked.

“We’re getting things ready like you had requested,” William answered.

‘You’re preparing for the sit-in protest?’

“I’m glad you checked in on it ahead of time. This place… will be Rohen’s—no, mankind’s final line of defense…” I said.

“You’re right. The engineers, mages, and stonemasons are hurriedly building a wall. There’s a slight issue, but the mood is great. It’s a small victory, but they seem to think this is a huge step,” William explained.

“I’m glad they feel that way,” I commented.

“Also…” William paused.

I walked out and saw the key figures of the operation looking at me.

When I looked at William, he nodded at me.

‘Yeah, this is how it should be since I showed them my potential.’

“It was a huge victory, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. *Hahahaha*, a great victory,” one of the key figures said.

“I’m glad you feel that way,” I said.

“At first, I thought the operation to reclaim Saint Bell was ridiculous, but the Saint of Flower and Fertility has proven himself in the end,” another chimed in.

“…”

“The soldiers are all waiting for you, Mr. Lee Ki-Young,” William said.

‘Are you guys going to cheer for me or something? It’s understandable since I’m a war hero. Imagining the excited survivors coming all the way here improved my mood, but… ‘

“Excuse me… Mr. William,” someone said.

“Yes?”

“In front of the city… Actually… I think you should head there yourself,” they added.

“…”

“I think… the enemy has sent a messenger,” they said.

I quickly realized that we didn’t even have time to relax.

William walked through the narrow path with a pretty solemn face. The others didn’t look all that different. They weren’t so stupid that they wouldn’t notice that something serious had happened.

‘A messenger?’

It was the same for me.

Of course, Saint Bell was no longer in the Ashen Sunset Region, but it wasn’t exactly completely protected. Whatever Kim Hyun-Sung’s side had prepared,

the unexpected quick feedback made it difficult for me to shake the unease filling up my heart.

My footsteps felt heavy.

I climbed up the low castle wall and looked forward…

"…"

I saw a face I hadn't seen in a while.

'Sun Hee-Young… '

Sun Hee-Young's hands were quietly folded before her long nun's robe. Unlike before, her hair had grown so long that it was dragging on the floor. No, it didn't look like hair. It looked like a waterfall of dark holy power. Each time she took a step, something black would sway. I was sure everyone felt the same way as me.

'That's dangerous.'

That was what my instincts were telling me.

Of course, I was happy to see her more than anything, but I couldn't help but flinch when I saw her gaze landing on me.

I had no idea what she heard from Kim Hyun-Sung, but Sun Hee-Young, the Saint of the Forsaken, looked at me as if I were a worthless bug.

[…]

"…"

[Offer the Saint of Flower and Fertility.]

"…"

[If you do, the Monarch of Sunset promises to show you mercy.]

CHAPTER 1160
SUSPICION (4)

[Offer the Saint of Flower and Fertility.]

"…"

[If you do, the Monarch of Sunset promises to show you mercy.]

'Damn it… '

When I saw her face filled with intense disgust, an overwhelming feeling I couldn't quite describe rose inside me. I told myself to watch over this incident as logically as possible, but it wasn't easy to think logically.

I expected this, but it left a bitter taste in my mouth.

'How is she so sure? How? Has it already been settled on her side?'

The guarantee from Kim Hyun-Sung was probably the deciding factor. If someone else had taken over this body of mine, anyone would have reacted the same way.

Even if that were the case…

'I have everything… '

I was aware of everything, including what had happened, how we met, and the stories we shared, but did none of that matter?

I questioned it, but all I could do in the end was nod. I wouldn't acknowledge it either.

They probably saw me as nothing more than a doll imitating someone, and

depending on the situation, they were probably furious. If they believed that the original was being held captive due to some incident, it wouldn't be strange for them to feel that way.

'Are they not considering the possibility that Lee Ki-Young himself sent a dummy? Damn it. Is this the side effect of perfecting my image?'

"…"

Naturally, I took a moment to catch my breath.

I realized that there was no need for me to be agitated because even if I were to think about it right now, I wouldn't find the answer.

I was at the point where the fake Ki-Young theory seemed more likely, but I wasn't at the point where I needed to acknowledge it. I wasn't feeling sorry for myself; it was more like there was no solid evidence to support it.

Of course, there were a few situational factors, but…

'What are you guys going to do if I'm the real one? Huh?'

'Just you wait. I really won't forgive you.'

I started tapping my thigh again, and I heard Sun Hee-Young's voice once again.

[Before we declare the 21st Legion's stance, we would like to make it clear that we're not enemies of Rohen.]

"…"

[The things that occurred in Rohen up until now was a small misunderstanding on our part, and the Monarch of Sunset is feeling really bad about the unfortunate incident that happened in the North.]

'There's no way Hyun-Sung will feel bad about it. He won't say anything like

that… '

[If we get what we want, the 21st Legion is prepared to return anytime, and the Saint of Flower and Fertility will become the starting point in working out the small misunderstanding between us.

[In addition, I believe our legion can be of great help in solving some of the issues you're facing. The 21st Legion has the power to either support the people of Rohen or abandon them.]

[The Monarch of Sunset is deeply concerned about the pointless fights and sacrifices, and we aim to resolve this issue through conversation and understanding rather than through violence. It's not that we don't understand how you feel, but we ask that you make a realistic decision.]

Unlike Sun Hee-Young, who was speaking calmly and rationally, I could feel Kim Hyun-Sung losing his sense of reason. Even though I couldn't see him, I had a feeling about how things were unfolding.

I was sure they said they needed to do something in order to calm down the incredibly agitated Kim Hyun-Sung. When he took over that Flesh and Gore or whatever, he wasn't in his right mind.

'I'm sure Kim Hyun-Sung's tantrum and the finances of the legion are in a mess.'

The legion probably couldn't stop thinking about how they caused too much trouble. If they hadn't been heading north for the Northern Expedition, they would have had some funds to spare, but even the 21st Legion lacked the resources to cover all bases.

Even if they had that much resources, they would still be stuck having to deal with the aftermath, as they lacked the time to strengthen their foundation.

If I were in his shoes, I would resort to using this method as well.

[Like I said earlier, we only want one thing—the Saint of Flower and

Fertility.]

"…"

[However, I would like to make it clear that you won't get a second chance. The price for betraying the legion is death. I'm not looking down on Rohen's small victory, but don't exaggerate the significance of this victory.]

"…"

[It's a meaningless and worthless victory. The reason you managed to take back this place was due to the failure of that lowly, ignorant demon, not the failure of the legion. The power of the legion is clearly above the people of Rohen.]

Sun Hee-Young gathered her hands quietly. I could feel her flowing hair gradually taking over this place. Her eyes, which once radiated gentleness and tenderness, grew cold, becoming filled with malice and hatred.

Although I wasn't sure what she was being hostile toward, Saint Bell City was engulfed by malice that was close to madness. All my hair stood on ned, and goosebumps broke out all over me.

It had been a while since I had seen that kind of look from her.

"…"

"…"

In the end, she spoke with no emotion in her eyes.

[The price for betraying kindness is death.]

'Yeah… she had quite the temper as well… '

[One week.]

"…"

[You have one week.]

It felt strange, and I was sure everyone felt the same way. Her gaze, which didn't seem to see humans as humans, was disturbingly strange. I saw undead creatures rising from the depths of her dark holy power.

Instead of skeletons with just bones, grotesque corpses were rising one after the other, filling the space. Although it was a bit different from our approach, the sight reminded me of her title.

The Saint of Forsaken…

"*Keegh…*"

"*Kyaaaaaaaaah!*"

The forsaken ones rose in response to her call. There were so many of them that I got tired of looking at them, but it was enough to prevent me from making any logical judgements.

"*Kyaaaaaaaaaaaah!*"

The black nun gathered her hands again while crying as if she were praying for those who were going to die.

'Damn it, damn it. You guys aren't going to abandon me, right?'

"…"

'William and Emilia. You guys aren't going to abandon me, right? You'll protect me, right?'

It didn't make sense for me to go there. How I was going to get treated when I went there wasn't important. The problem was that I would be deviating from the plan, and it was the one thing I couldn't do.

‘Someone say something.’

“…”

“…”

‘Someone please say something.’

Everyone seemed to be at a loss for words. I was sure they realized that she was completely different from Chalkis. After a while, one of the bystanders looked around nervously before saying, “I-I think… we should discuss the next step.”

‘The next step?’

“I don’t understand what you mean by the next step,” William said.

‘Will, you don’t need to answer so coldly from the start. He hasn’t said anything yet. I don’t think they’re crazy enough to sacrifice me.’

“Is there a need to discuss this?” William asked.

“No… it’s not that… but didn’t see that just now? There was a huge number of undead creatures a-and… that strange nun. There were enough corpses to create a mountain of them.

“When I suggested that we discuss the next step… I wasn’t talking about Mr. Lee Ki-Young… I’m talking about how we should protect Saint Bell moving forward… and our next course of actions,” they replied.

“…”

“…”

Look at them reading the room.

‘Especially the ones who were lining up to butter me up—yeah, you guys give

me the creeps.'

Of course, they couldn't just outright say it, and even if they got the chance, they wouldn't be able to say it so easily.

How could they give me up when I had contributed the most in the Saint Bell operation? Unless they were lunatics with no social skills, they wouldn't be able to suggest that.

Obviously, they would eventually start feeling anxious. As the days went by, they'd spend more time wondering about her offer. Their faces told me that they knew there was no hope. They finally realized what they were up against and what they had to overcome to achieve victory.

"Don't worry, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," William said.

"…"

"I have no intention of agreeing to such ridiculous demands," he reassured me.

'Really?'

'It's true that what she was demanding was ridiculous, and there's no guarantee that they'll keep their promise.'

As soon as Will recited the Fundamental Declaration, the lowlifes got up, just as I expected.

"Of course we have to protect him. No matter what anyone says, Mr. Lee Ki-Young is the treasure of Rohen."

"It looks like the demons are terrified. *Hahaha*. I'm sure they realized that Mr. Lee Ki-Young has been doing a great job leading the players."

"If that wasn't the case, how would they know what he's been doing…"

“I’m glad we managed to buy a week’s time. It’s an opportunity for us and a bad move for them.”

‘But why do you guys look worried? Obviously, I appeared to be grateful.’

‘It looks like I’ve been deeply distrustful of people all along.’

I was sure some of them were already nervous, but it seemed like everyone was supporting me.

Everyone was encouraging each other as if Rohen had already become one. They shouted that they would never give in to the demons, and they vowed to protect Saint Bell no matter what until the end.

Although some were speaking out of turn, everyone was cheering me on.

Rohen had truly become one.

“Saint Bell will never lose.”

There was hope on the horizon.

“We should find a way to stop the undead creatures. We don’t have a lot of time, but let’s do our best.”

I had been waiting for this atmosphere, but that hope was bound to be broken.

“…”

Eight hours later…

“William didn’t notice you guys, did he?”

“*Shh*, Oppa. Be quiet.”

“You really think those demons will take us in?”

“Seriously, just shut up.”

In the dead of night—around 3:29 a.m.—masked figures gathered in the bedroom of the twenty-three-year-old Flower Ki-Young, and they were all staring down at him.

CHAPTER 1161
SUSPICION (5)

'Geez, these guys are crossing the line. Seriously… this is too much.'

Wherever one went, there would always be opportunists, but I never thought they'd appear so soon. It hadn't even been eight hours since then.

A tragic event occurred before the warmth of the united Rohen had faded, and a part of me thought that these jerks who showed up here were quite something.

It was likely that the terror shown by the 21st Legion was the reason behind their decision, but the real reason behind their actions was probably due to the fact that they would have reason to talk to them.

Sun Hee-Young's rational approach seemed to be working, and the very slim possibility of having a negotiation was probably what led them here.

I couldn't check the faces of the masked people, but…

'I think I know who they are… '

The ones who were friendly with me even before Operation: Dawn and those who gleefully flattered me while rubbing their hands together.

There was no way lower-ranking players could fool the eyes of the Flower and Fertility Familia, so I was sure they hadn't assembled a group of insignificant people.

Despite being calm, dozens of thoughts popped into my head.

'Haa… these scumbags.'

"…"

"You never said he'd be awake, damn it."

"…"

"I wouldn't scream if I were you, Mr. Lee Ki-Young… Unless you want to die in vain in a place like this."

"…"

'Looks like they're at least trying to be respectful.'

I thought they were just going to cover my mouth and kidnap me, but it wasn't the case because they looked really shocked about the fact that I was still awake. However, the biggest reason was that I was observing them calmly.

If I had screamed or tried to run away, they would have grabbed me, but I looked at them with confidence, as if I had expected this and had been waiting for them.

They looked as if their plan had been ruined the moment they saw me.

Amidst the awkward silence, they looked at each other, not knowing what to do next.

'This is the making of a feel-good story.'

A warm and beautiful story blooming from the battlefield. A heartwarming true story that would be passed down for generations. This felt like the kind of tale that could fit into the saga of a saint who not only taught the criminals a lesson but also forgave them.

"What should we do?"

"What do you mean? Use a sleeping spell and put him to sleep… or knock

him out. We don't have time for this. Hurry… we need to move…"

I had a feeling this was the only time I was going to have a chance to say something.

"It'll be useless," I said.

"Don't do anything foolish, Mr. Lee Ki-Young."

"Since you've come here… I know I have no choice but to comply," I said.

"Let's just take him and don't talk to him, damn it…"

"The demons will never make deals with humans. Whether you take me or not, it won't change their mind about invading Rohen. All of you are also—"

"Shut up, you asshole."

"Just be a little more—"

"*Blah, blah blah. Blah, blah, blah.* You sure have a lot to say… I never really liked this jerk. He's just a rookie who arrived in Rohen not that long ago. He knows nothing…"

'Damn it. Heartwarming story, my ass.'

'Looks like there's a scumbag among them.'

"I'm sure I told you that violence is not allowed."

"We came this far, so who cares? We already got caught, so it's over for us. Either we die here or there. I just want to place my bet on the one that has a higher chance of success, even if it's just a bit higher. You saw the undead creatures as well. Do you really want to die here?" the scumbag asked.

"…"

"We might be able to protect Rohen as well. Like he said during the

departure ceremony, this place is our hometown. You think this rookie knows how we feel? This jerk doesn't know anything. How could he when he's been here for less than a year?

"What about our families… friends… children… What about them? Continuing this war is basically suicide. This is way better. We have to try something. Am I wrong? I thought logically and chose the path that will save everyone," he added.

"…"

"Let's be honest here. Is this jerk more important than Rohen?" he asked.

"…"

"…"

'You think that's enough to convince them?'

"I'm sorry, Mr. Lee Ki-Young."

'Are you really sorry?'

"I didn't want to do this… but we can't just stand by and watch Rohen get destroyed. Please forgive us…"

For some reason, I couldn't say anything.

Actually, it was more like I couldn't say anything because this scumbag wouldn't stop talking.

'You're really upsetting the foreigners… '

The Rohen locals' resistance sure was scary.

It was so scary that it's making me feel emotional. Only some of them agreed with his reasoning. It was the scumbag who was saying all these ridiculous

things, but I was bothered by the fact that he said I wasn't a denizen of Rohen.

It wasn't like I belonged anywhere in the first place, but from the fake Ki-Young's point of view, it was like I had nowhere to lean on.

'Maybe… '

It'd be better if I were to head to the 21st Legion, regardless of what was going to happen. I couldn't help but think that way.

I knew I would be deviating from the plan, but going there myself and facing the problem could probably resolve the issue. Obviously, talking to Kim Hyun-Sung wouldn't be easy, but still…

'I might be able to talk to Sun Hee-Young, at least.'

If I were to explain the situation clearly to her now that she had regained her composure, it was highly likely that his attitude would change a bit.

'No, it'll be impossible to talk to him.'

Based on the current situation, I had no memories at all.

It would be better just to say that my memories were a bit hazy. Unlike Lee Ki-Young, the Blue Guild was looking for those Memory Beads. When the Memory Beads had been recovered, I could slowly unravel my memories.

I would then be able to discuss the next steps with them, so perhaps…

Right now, I had no other choice.

I could ask for help if I really pushed for it, but meeting Sun Hee-Young didn't seem like such a bad idea either. I couldn't see properly due to the perception restriction spell that they had cast on me as well as the cloth covering my eyes, but I could feel myself being transported somewhere.

After a while…

Boom!

I heard something massive falling from the sky.

“What the hell! Wh-What’s… going on… all of sudden…”

“*Ah?*”

“W-We…”

“Prepare for battle… Prepare for battle, damn it!”

Boom! Craaaaaack!

“*Ahhhhhhhhhhhh!*”

“Run! Shit!”

“Damn it… damn it!”

I was tumbling somewhere against my will. I was sure one of the guys who was carrying me had ended up losing their hold on me. I was tumbling mindlessly, so I was in so much pain that it felt like I was receiving a beatdown, but I still felt great.

‘Justice will prevail.’

Were they captured by the pursuers? Or was it Ha-Yan? Or had Will finally caught on? If that wasn’t the case, then we were most likely in the Ashen Sunset Region by now.

It was possible that those fools were discarded after they finished their job. If it were Sun Hee-Young, she wouldn’t hesitate to teach them a lesson, which would prove that they were dumb enough to believe her words.

“*Aaaah!*”

“Please… spare us. We…”

“We brought the Saint of Flower and Fertility! I’m sure there’s some sort of misunderstanding. The Saint of Flower and Fertility—”

“We brought the Saint of Flower and Fertility, damn it!”

“Damn it!”

“…”

“…”

The voices gradually faded away, so I wasn’t sure whether they died or not, but it seemed like the situation was pretty much over.

I felt someone was carrying me somewhere.

Considering the conversation I overheard, the person carrying me definitely wasn’t Jung Ha-Yan, Will, or figures from Rohen…

Had Hyun-Sung come for me? Had he realized that I was the real Ki-Young and had decided to repent?

Afterward, a hand slowly removed the blindfold on me.

Once the darkness cleared, I saw my benefactor.

“…”

‘Hye-Jin?’

“…”

She was clad in full armor, and a blue helmet was hiding her face. Despite that, I knew the identity of my savior. There was a long spear on her back, and her frame looked familiar.

'Are you Hye-Jin?'

"You're…"

'You came to save me.'

"…"

The figure wearing the armor said nothing. Instead, I felt them placing me on the ground extremely carefully. All of their actions were cautious, as if they were worried that I was going to fall.

'You… '

I couldn't quite describe her appearance when she nodded lightly at me, but anyone could tell that she cared about me. She neither asked about how I had been doing or what was going on. The way she stared at me, like she had forgotten how to talk, immediately made me aware of what was going on.

She decided not to talk to me, as I had lost my memories.

'You're… a dummy.'

Of course, I wasn't sure about it, but I easily deduced the answer to my question.

Of course, the evidence before my eyes helped me greatly.

I could see that she wasn't given a proper body. I wondered whether there was even a body inside that armor. I also wondered if she was designed as a mute or if she had simply chosen not to say anything.

Anyway, it was puzzling.

After setting me upright, she slowly and steadily lifted her hand.

"…"

"…"

Her movement was so cautious that I felt kind of embarrassed.

She lifted her hand, removed the dirt on my shoulder, and pushed back my hair to check my face. Her hand seemed to be shaking a little. I felt her cold armor instead of a warm hand, but it didn't put me in a bad mood.

I actually felt like the stress accumulating within me was being relieved just a bit. Although it was only for a little bit, I felt at peace. It was like Jo Hye-Jin understood how I felt.

'Hey, what's wrong? This is unlike you… '

Jo Hye-Jin caressing my cheek.

'?'

She placed the palm of her hand on my cheek and kept rubbing her thumb against my cheek.

'Oh no… s-she must like me.'

Of course, the person before me was most likely to be Dummy Hye-Jin, but her data was based on the real one.

What if Jo Hye-Jin's affection for Kim Hyun-Sung was merely a facade?

What if it was a plan to hide her feelings from me?

Had she ended up liking a friend?

"…"

"…"

Like a puppy that liked to lick someone's cheek or hand, she was touching my face with a lot of care. It sounded funny, but I felt like the face behind the

helmet was smiling.

“…”

“…”

‘Hye-Jin… do you… like me?’

‘Have you been secretly… nurturing your love toward me?’

CHAPTER 1162
INTERNAL STABILITY (1)

For some reason, I felt like running away for love or something. If I were Fake Ki-Young rather than Real Ki-Young, I felt like I would run away for love with Fake Hye-Jin.

It wasn't that I didn't want to resolve the issue, but I couldn't help but imagine it at this moment.

'I must be… weak-hearted toward people who treat me kindly.'

I was fully aware that it was just a classic form of escapism.

If Flower Ki-Young was just a puppet that couldn't change the current situation no matter how hard he tried…

'Running away with her wouldn't be a bad idea.'

If we were to keep running away, or if there were a decent deal, Kim Hyun-Sung would probably just leave me alone.

Perhaps it wasn't a bad idea to enjoy small joys in a place where no one can find us.

We could have a son and two daughters; we could build a little cottage, and Hye-Jin could hunt, cook, and fix the house while I cheered her on from the sidelines. It kind of bothered me because that version of Hye-Jin seemed like she couldn't talk, but so what?

There were many ways to communicate.

Of course, I knew better than anyone that it was a ridiculous thought because Lee Ji-Hye and I would never allow anything to slip past our control.

In fact, even imagining it was impossible. The thought wasn't even worth serious consideration, not with a mind still heavily influenced by Lee Ki-Young's way of thinking.

'Abandon everything and just live happily ever after?'

Regardless of whether I was real or fake, I never compromised. I wasn't exactly happy about it because it felt like I was shadowboxing, but at the very least, struggling like this was suitable for me—at least until I could clearly see who I really was.

Now was the time where I had no choice but to turn down Jo Hye-Jin's sincere gaze.

"Who—"

She suddenly pulled my cheek.

Obviously, it felt like she was telling me not to have ridiculous thoughts.

"You're…"

She pulled my other cheek as if telling me not to say anything absurd.

'What the hell? What do you want me to do?'

To make things worse, she shook my head so hard that it felt like my face was going to fall off.

'Come to think of it, I wonder what she thinks of me.'

I wasn't sure if she was being friendly because I simply looked like Lee Ki-Young or if she was protecting me because I was Dummy Lee Ki-Young, but whatever her reason was, it was giving me a headache.

In addition, I had been thinking about the damned possibilities. The latter seemed more likely, but… when I thought about someone sending her to me

because they wanted me to think that I was a dummy, I felt like I was back to square one.

One thing I was sure of was that this version of Jo Hye-Jin was able to carve out her own path—a path independent from the 21st Legion and the Monarch of Sunset.

Secondly, she didn't seem like a robot moving based on commands, and thirdly, she wasn't showing hostility toward me.

If I were to talk about her negatively, I'd say she was another card I could use.

Based on my personality and the current situation where there were many variables… I couldn't really trust her, but still…

'I finally have someone I can trust.'

That fact was really comforting…

Of course, I wasn't sure if I needed to treat her like a human… but still… she was better than nothing.

Whatever was happening, I needed to make a good impression.

I frowned, and Jo Hye-Jin had to have realized that I was in pain because she quietly let go of my cheeks. I wanted to yell at her and ask what she was doing, but I couldn't.

My red cheeks made me look like I was flustered, so I covered my face and took two steps backward.

"Who… are you?" I asked.

"…"

"I mean, I know who you are, but why… why did you save me? Aren't you a

subordinate… of the Monarch of Sunset?" I asked.

Dummy Hye-Jin took out her spear quietly.

I was kind of worried that she was going to stab me, but she started writing on the ground.

— Because I wanted to.

"What do you-"

— There isn't much I can say. All I can say is that I'm glad that you're safe.

"Do you know me?" I questioned.

— I don't know whether you're the person I know or not, but I'm sure I know you.

"Then which version of me do you know?" I asked.

— The Sub Guild Master of the Blue.

"…"

— And my friend.

Whether it was on the continent or in Dummy World, that was my job. We were indeed friends, but that wasn't what I was asking.

— I don't remember anything else. All I know… is that you're really important to me, but at the same time, I resent you.

'Did I play jokes on her as well?'

"What in the world is… Blue…" I mumbled.

— You'll… find out.

“Why is the Monarch of Sunset looking for me? Does it have anything to do with this?” I asked.

— I can’t answer that either.

“Did someone send you here?” I asked.

— No one.

“What’s your goal?” I questioned.

— My first goal is to stop the people trying to invade the Ashen Sunset Region. My second goal is to move based on my own will. At the moment, it is to protect you.

Her will seemed stronger than I thought. Assuming that the Monarch of Sunset’s side knew about her existence, a question popped up in my head.

‘What do they think of her?’

Now that I thought about it, I felt like she wasn’t Dummy Jo Hye-Jin, as she seemed like she couldn’t talk and couldn’t really express herself to the 21st Legion.

Since she was here, the real Jo Hye-Jin… was still on the continent.

There was a high chance that she was a combat doll modeled after Jo Hye-Jin.

In addition, she wasn’t really made to resemble her. She was also covered in armor, so I wouldn’t be surprised if someone thought she was a living armor with Jo Hye-Jin’s battle program installed in it.

It was highly likely that she hadn’t even considered the possibility that she was thinking this way. Her appearance in the video earlier looked like someone who had completely lost their humanity.

“Are you truly aware of who you are?” I asked.

— A little.

“Is the Monarch of Sunset’s side aware of this truth?” I questioned.

— They’re not.

‘It’s clear… she doesn’t know anything.’

Excluding Hee-Ra and Ji-Hye noona, no one really knew about the Dummy World, so she obviously never even thought about it.

I wasn’t sure whether this dummy was the same dummy at the time, but it was undeniable that Ji-Hye noona and Lee Ki-Young were involved in all this.

‘Why did I come back?’

If we were the same dummies…

The Dummy World was abandoned when the continent became a dungeon…

‘Was there a reason why the dummies had no choice but to sign a contract?’

Now that I think about it, there was one reason.

‘Server maintenance cost?’

Even a perfect server needed maintenance, as it was still a program at its core.

The dummies probably sought stability while proclaiming independence, but there was no way that they could generate funds to maintain and update the servers themselves.

While it was possible for a short time, it was a band-aid solution. It could never be a long-term solution. Whenever we were short on funds, we could just gather holy power outside, and the Dummy World wasn’t any different.

‘If anything, they might be worse.’

Now that I thought about it, the Dummy World was full of side effects and variables after so many experiments and resets. It wouldn't be strange if there were issues with some data, and they could have signed a contract to fix it.

I wanted to confirm this assumption, but unfortunately, Dummy Hye-Jin seemed like she didn't know anything, and to make things worse, it seemed like she was under some restrictions.

There was no point in investigating any further.

"In that case…" I paused.

"…"

"What are you planning on doing with me?" I asked.

— Humans are coming.

'Ah, so they're on their way here. Looks like running away isn't an option.'

— I must return as well. I received a mission.

"…"

— Sub guild master.

"I don't know. I don't know what that means… what you want, and what's happening to me," I said.

— I understand that you're confused about many things, but there's one thing I would like to say…

"…"

— You must believe in yourself.

'Yeah, I want to believe in myself as well.'

‘I want to believe in myself more than anyone, but I really can’t trust myself.’

“…”

‘This jerk is always scamming people, so who in their right mind will trust him? To make matters worse, he even scams himself.’

I knew there was a reason behind his actions. However, I couldn’t help but feel that there was a reason to be anxious about his actions this time.

“…”

— Ki-Young, you have to trust yourself.

I wasn’t sure if she was saying that because she knew something or if she was simply trying to give me courage.

However, it worked, as I felt a bit more courageous.

‘It’s really funny how things can change with that one comment… ‘

She was correct, too. Whatever the case was, I was aware of the fact that playing this game and winning would be advantageous for me.

In addition, Lee Ki-Young would always play games in which he would win.

‘I don’t know what you want.’

Whether I was real or fake, I never compromised.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young.”

“The saint is over there!”

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young!”

“Are you okay?”

“He’s here! We found him!”

I heard voices from afar. I turned around briefly, and when I looked at Jo Hye-Jin again, I could no longer see her. I thought it made sense since both sides considered each other as enemies, but I was kind of sad that she hadn’t said goodbye to me.

Soon, the players approached me with the members of the Flower and Fertility Familia.

They checked my condition and examined the guys who had almost crossed the Jordan River.

William had to have gone in the opposite direction because I saw him late. As soon as he got here, he examined me and reached out to remove the kidnappers’ masks.

However, I raised my hand and stopped him.

“Please don’t remove them, Mr. William,” I said.

“Pardon?” William asked.

“I don’t think we need to know who they are. I’d appreciate it if you could think of today as a mistake and move on without any further discussion,” I requested.

“But… but, Mr. Lee Ki-Young, these people—”

‘That’s why we need to make sure we use them as meat shields. We’re at a critical moment where every bit of strength counts.’

“I’m sure it’s because they were anxious, scared, and afraid. They didn’t act out of a desire for their own safety but because they were thinking about Rohen. If we make this an issue and put them on trial, we might be able to unite our allies, but we won’t be able to win over everyone,” I explained.

"…"

"And…" I paused.

"…"

"Their choice… may not be the… wrong choice," I continued.

"What… do you mean, Mr. Lee Ki-Young?" he asked.

"What I'm trying to say is that perhaps what the Monarch of Sunset truly desires isn't Rohen, Mr. William," I answered.

"…"

"It's hard to explain the details, but… I get the feeling that I'm more deeply involved than I thought," I added.

'I need to strengthen him first.'

"I think… there's a certain power inside me, and they've been desperately looking for it," I said while giving off a doomsday vibe.

CHAPTER 1163
INTERNAL STABILITY (2)

I was aware that the setup was a bit excessive. I was a genius, but I had no idea that I was one. I was a saint chosen and beloved by the Goddess of Flower and Fertility, who was considered a Tier 1 GENIUS.

I was basically an angel in human form.

I was filled with dreams, hopes, and courage, but I was also innocent.

I get hurt pretty easily, but I was extremely tenacious.

Apparently, there was some unknown power sleeping inside me.

William wasn't fully aware of Lee Ki-Young's memory loss or terminal illness, but it could be considered that this setup was a bit too much.

"…"

"…"

'Even I think I went too far. Even if I were a character created in the 80s or 90s, I would think the same thing.'

This setup would raise eyebrows even during times when wild and edgy setups were popular. However, if one had already decided to go too far, one ought to go all out. In addition, creating an overly dramatic character would be less unnatural than that.

"I don't really understand… can you tell me more about it?" William requested.

"It's embarrassing to tell you this, but…" I paused.

"…"

"Since I arrived in Rohen, I've been having the same dream. It sounds crazy, but…!" I shouted.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young, we're in Rohen. Having the same dream every night isn't something to take lightly," William said.

'He's right. I am in Rohen.'

"I… see," I mumbled.

"Whatever you tell me, I'm ready to take it seriously. Actually… I was thinking about something similar as well," William revealed.

"Pardon?"

"To be honest, I think you're the key for this mainstream event. The incidents in Harizel and Saint Bell seemed to be telling me that. The 21st Legion that suddenly appeared seems oddly connected to you in many ways," William answered.

"*Ah…*"

"I hope I'm just overthinking it, but there were many times… where I felt like Rohen was revolving around you, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. It started happening after you arrived here. I'm certain you have something hidden," William continued.

It'd be strange if he hadn't been thinking that way, as the twenty-three-year-old Flower Ki-Young was on the verge of suffocating beneath the cringeworthy weight of this overly dramatic setup.

'At this point, it's like I'm going around with my arms open and yelling out that I'm the protagonist.'

"If you're too uncomfortable to tell me, you can tell me next time—"

“No, I want to tell you as well,” I interrupted him.

“…”

“There’s *something* sealed inside me,” I revealed.

Obviously, it wasn’t the Shadow Flame Dragon.

“Excuse me?”

“The dream begins with me being aware that it’s a dream. I’m hanging on top of a massive, grotesque tower, and thousands—no, tens of thousands of demons are kneeling before me.

“I also saw demons in priest uniforms chanting some kind of spell,” I explained.

“…”

“‘Father will come. Father will come. The father confined in a worthless vessel will finally descend and be with us,’“ I said.

“That’s…”

“The dream version of me knows what kind of *being* is sealed inside me and that this *vessel* is on the brink of breaking. I gathered my hands and prayed while standing on top of the tower to prevent this *being* from breaking out into the world, despite knowing that it’s impossible,” I explained.

“…”

“I’d always confront my anxiety and fear, but my dream never changes,” I said.

“…”

“And someone slices my throat…” I paused.

"…"

"And I die," I continued.

"…"

"And the blood dripping down my corpse travels through tiny grooves, forming patterns. The grotesque tower is soon covered with patterns drawn with my blood, and the bizarre altar beneath it starts dripping with blood.

"An unimaginable amount of blood keeps pouring out of my human body—far more blood than you'd expect. The demons will then sing until the blood pouring out of me incessantly becomes a small lake.

"They would then perform an indescribable and incomprehensible ritual," I added.

The description was so detailed that it made William gulp.

"When the blood from the tower had all fallen onto the altar, an enormous being beyond my comprehension would rise. It was a being so terrifying that it filled me with an unbearable fear even though I hadn't seen it yet.

"The myriad of demons would bow before that being. Its resurrection and rebirth are greeted by countless deaths, fears, and sins," I continued.

"What happened to you… Mr. Lee Ki-Young?" William questioned.

"I probably died. In my dream, I was a vessel for something that couldn't be contained," I answered.

In a nutshell, the setup was that a being incomparable to Bahamut's demon seed was sealed within me.

"At first, I convinced myself that it was nothing… but I knew this would eventually happen," I said. The viewers watching from the sidelines started sending messages, and their response told me the true gravity of the

situation.

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ is asking why you never talked about that dream. She's worried about you because it's something that can certainly happen.]

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ mumbles, saying that an ancient demon is probably sealed in you. It can be the Great Ancient Demon or a being stronger than that.]

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ nods, indicating that they're prepared to make any sacrifice for your sake.]

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ has donated 10,000 coins.]

[The Boy Adorned With Earrings of Truth is questioning that this is a bit too sudden. He says that it doesn't make sense for a human body to contain the Great Ancient Demon.]

[The Mistress of the Holy Night♥ says that it's probably due to your pure and flawless nature. She deduces that it's the reason why the most corrupt being was sealed inside you. This continent and dimension are filled with phenomena and events that even they can't comprehend, so the idea that a demon is sealed inside you isn't entirely unrealistic.]

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ is worried about the events that will happen in the future and the pain you'll have to bear.]

[He Who Sits on the Golden Throne♥ is worried that this event might influence not just Rohen, but the entire dimension.]

[The Crooked Guardian says everything will be resolved if you die.]

[The Lowest Abyss of the Abyss♥ suggests that some of the GENIUSES should refrain from speaking too much. Telling someone to take their own life is a direct violation of Rohen's law and warns that if this behavior doesn't

stop, they'll make a report to the higher-ups.]

[The Wolf Crying Under the Crescent Moon says that this isn't something that can be overlooked, and given the unique circumstances, an exceptional clause should be applied.]

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ says there are no exceptions to Rohen's law. She is confident that her contractors will overcome this crisis wisely.]

The public opinion wasn't bad. For a moment, I thought the real Ki-Young could be among the GENIUS, but that wasn't important right now.

Even while we were moving toward Saint Bell, Will looked like he was deep in thought.

It was important to power up the guy who had the potential to grow even stronger.

"I think it's best if we keep this between us for now," William suggested.

"Okay," I answered.

"You mustn't tell this to anyone, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. For the time being, I'd like it if only you and I were aware of this," William requested.

Obviously, this wasn't something I could tell other people because even William was deep in thought. It wasn't easy to say to people that a being that could threaten Rohen—no, the entire dimension, was sealed inside me.

"Some extremists might target you, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," he said.

"But if all of this is true, what should I do?" I asked.

"I-I'll try to find a way. Until then, we need to prepare for the defense battle at Saint Bell…" William suggested.

‘You’re not trying to cut ties with me, are you?’

‘I’m sure he won’t since he told me some things.’

I was sure there were many things he needed to think about. In the worst-case scenario, it was worth considering taking measures to prevent whatever was inside me from breaking out into the world. Of course, I had faith in my Will, but…

‘Yeah, he’s not the type to cut ties with people.’

He was a man of good morals and conduct.

It was to the point that he could repeatedly declare the principles he had been following all his life.

He wasn’t someone who could sacrifice one person to protect Rohen.

As expected, despite hearing something that could sway him, I saw him keeping Saint Bell under control. Just like yesterday, there was a sense of chaos and an eerie tension within the city, but the atmosphere was stable.

“We need to raise the walls on this side a little more.”

“Should I call for a mage?”

“No… the stonemasons have to do this themselves.”

Before worrying about how the higher-ups would react to the ridiculous offer, many things needed to be done. There were things like building the walls as planned and preparing everything required in the defense war.

Meanwhile, William secretly freed the captured criminals in the temple, all the while examining the walls and having constant conversations with the higher-ups around him.

“This place will become mankind’s final sanctuary. We cannot give this place

up no matter what," William declared.

"Right…"

"And the reinforcements…" William asked.

"They said it'll take over a week, even if they rush here. Many cities, including Arhendel…"

"I see," he said.

"By the way, Mr. William. Regarding those noises we heard in the middle of the night…"

"It was nothing," he told them.

The fact that he was keeping his promise made it clear that he believed it wasn't a wise idea to make a big deal out of the recent incident…

Of course, those in the know had most likely figured it out, and they were probably spreading a rumor about how the Saint of Flower and Fertility was kidnapped in the middle of the night, but the kidnappers were forgiven instead of being punished.

'It's a touching story.'

Some would insult me and say that it was a foolish decision, but others would understand my feelings. At this point, they probably realized that this was a message about everyone coming together as one rather than distinguishing right from wrong.

Along with fear, the atmosphere of unity was spreading as well.

A small hope was rising amidst the dawn in Saint Bell.

It was a small hope that humanity could once again overcome this challenge with a shared sense of purpose and unity for the sake of what we hold dear.

There were many meetings, but no one suggested handing me over to the other side.

Just like that, two days passed, and there were only five days left until the deadline.

When I closed my eyes, I saw William in my dreams.

"…"

"…"

"Mr. William?" I said.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young? What's… are you really Mr. Lee Ki-Young? Where am I…" William questioned.

"Yes, it's me, Mr. William," I answered.

After looking around, he immediately understood what was going on.

"I'm… in your dream," William remarked.

Since we lacked time, Will's strengthening drama had to be filmed in a dream.

— This is fine, right, oppa?

'Yeah, thanks, noona.'

CHAPTER 1164
INTERNAL STABILITY (3)

The location I had chosen as the stage was an apocalyptic world where Rohen was destroyed. I felt this with Hyun-Sung as well, but if I wanted to introduce an apocalyptic mood, the stage had to be in a wasteland.

Who cared about logic in a dream? Showing a ruined world was the most important.

The ashen sunset stained the entire world, and the air smelled rotten.

Seeing Will look around the dreary world where the word “hope” had vanished made me realize that I had made the right choice. He was obviously aware that this was a dream, but the emotions he was feeling were still real.

“This is interesting. Actually, I can’t tell… if this is a dream anymore,” William said.

I was sure he had many questions.

He started by questioning if this was really a dream, and I felt like he was also wondering if he had truly become a part of my dream.

Of course, I knew he was going to quickly adapt to this situation.

‘It’s realistic, after all.’

The wind blowing past his skin and the foul odor in the air as well as my voice were so real that he wouldn’t question their authenticity.

There was clearly a difference between his normal dreams and this dream. A sharp-minded individual would easily realize that this strange feeling was happening because of the figure in front of them.

If this were Earth, he would deny this dream, but like he told me earlier, we were on Rohen, not on Earth. This was another world where things beyond common sense often happened.

He was also one of the people who adapted quickly to Rohen, so I was sure it wouldn't be difficult for him to adapt to what was going on.

"…"

"This place is…" William mumbled.

"I don't know either. Besides the fact that it's Rohen…" I said.

"It's really strange," William said.

"What is?" I asked.

"This place doesn't feel like a dream to me. It's so realistic… to call it a dream… and I don't even know why I'm here…" William answered.

"…"

"This might be a task that was given to me," William added.

"I'm sorry?"

"Right now, I can't quite figure out what's going on, but I'm sure there's a reason why I was brought here. Maybe this is part of the goddess's design…" William said.

'It's nothing like that.'

William's line of thought was advantageous for me, and there was no reason for me to stop him from looking for a reason behind all this. At the moment, continuing this story was more important than talking about this dream.

After confirming that William had entered my dream, I had to say something.

“M-Mr. William.”

“Yes?”

“Y-You must run,” I stuttered.

Chitter, chitter, chitter…

I unknowingly turned to the source of the sound and saw a thin, elongated demon.

The way it walked toward us while twisting around as if it were some kind of twisted donut was grotesque enough to make me frown.

Its eyes were empty, and its mouth was closed tight, looking like it was stitched up hundreds of times. I couldn’t figure out how it was able to walk. The demon used its finger as a cane and scanned its surroundings before turning toward us.

“…”

“Run,” I repeated.

I saw William looking at the demon in disbelief. He was probably asking…

‘What the hell is that?’

I was sure he had figured out that the figure before us was no ordinary demon. It wasn’t just its appearance; it was also emitting an energy that was leagues stronger than Chalkis’.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young. I’ll—this place…”

William couldn’t continue his sentence because the demon’s twisted claws pierced his abdomen.

“*AAAAH!*”

The scream didn't sound like it belonged to Will, but it was understandable since he could feel himself getting split into two.

'But you have to endure it, Will.'

"*AAAAAH!*"

'Endure it. You have to endure it in order to become even stronger.'

"*Aaaaargh!*"

"…"

"…"

This was his first death in the dream.

Not long afterward, I heard a loud *thud*.

'He's awake.'

I was sure he immediately awakened from his dream upon getting split in half.

He immediately came to find me.

He kept knocking on the door, but he seemed to be thinking that just knocking wasn't enough to wake me up, as he sounded like he was going to break open the door.

Despite hearing the murmurs of the surprised guards, he ended up breaking the door to enter my room.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young," William said.

"…"

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young, can you hear me?" William asked.

Naturally, I got up quietly with a pale face.

“Yes,” I answered.

“Just now…” William paused.

“…”

“Just now, I think I was in your dream, but I wanted to make sure…” William continued.

“I was wondering that as well… So you really… did enter my dream,” I confirmed.

“I knew it. Are you… feeling okay?” William asked.

“I should be asking you that, Are you okay?” I asked.

“Pardon?”

After that, I looked at him worriedly.

“I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have told you that… I think I’m the one who got you… involved in this. This didn’t happen in my dream. You—I don’t know if it’s because you entered my dream or if my symptoms have gotten worse, but… something feels off. This is…” I paused.

“…”

“Was it because I told you about my dreams? Or maybe it’s because I was subconsciously hoping that you would help me. Why did that demon—”

“No, you don’t have to think that way. It’s hard for me to give you a clear answer, but something has changed. There are questionable situations to say it was simply a dream. Can I ask what happened after I died?” William asked.

“It was the same. That demon dragged me to the top of the tower, and the

rest is the same. Maybe…" I replied.

"…"

"Maybe that demon appeared to kick you out," I suggested.

There was something there, and the words I mumbled without much thought caused Will to fall into deep contemplation.

If that demon was there to kick him out, why was it there to kick William out when he was summoned to my dreams?

That wasn't the only strange thing. He was probably questioning why things had changed the moment I confessed to him about my dream. There was also the most important question—why was I having that kind of dream in the first place?

It wasn't just a prophetic dream. It didn't show the future, and it didn't reflect my subconscious in any way. I thought Will would be able to catch on to my intentions, and just as I expected, he continued the conversation.

"Maybe…"

"Yes?"

"Maybe… the demon is trying to tear you down, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. I'm talking about your internal stability," William said.

'Yeah, that's what I'm talking about.'

"The *being* sealed inside you must be the reason behind it. Also… I don't know why, but the influence that this *being* has on you is growing stronger. If the same dream has been changing for the worse…" William paused.

"Then you…" I mumbled.

"I don't know how I managed to enter your dream… but like I told you in the

dream… I personally think that this is part of the goddess's plan. If the influence of the being inside you is gradually getting stronger, then the ongoing war might soon become meaningless.

"I'm sure the goddess is thinking about it seriously," William explained.

"…"

"The external conflict isn't the only battle to be fought," William added.

"So we have to fight… in this dream as well," I mumbled.

"That's right," William said.

"B-But how do we fight it? The enemy is strong. It's a frightening and terrifying being. I'm worried that you might get hurt…" I said.

"It's fine. The things that are happening in your dream… don't seem to be affecting reality… so for now, let's see if the same thing happens tomorrow," William suggested.

'He's pretending to be calm.'

It was probably because I was in front of him. He was trying to be calm, but I could see his hands slightly trembling.

I was sure he had experienced many life-or-death situations before.

I wasn't looking down on him, but experiencing death and not having any experience when it came to life-or-death situations was an entirely different matter.

He wasn't put in a position where dying like Kim Hyun-Sung would be the better choice, so it was fair to say that he had grown up too sheltered, like a delicate flower in a greenhouse.

I was sure the situation was abnormal for him.

He was pretending like nothing was wrong, but the pain and fear he experienced during that time had to have been etched into his mind.

He hadn't died in a peaceful way; he was split into half. He didn't just get stabbed with a sword; he was torn apart. I could still hear William's scream. Although some time had passed, he was still afraid of dying the same way.

'I didn't ask you to fight the demon and win.'

'I just want you to grow stronger.'

"…"

"…" Soon, it was night again.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young, run… ruuuuun! *Aaaargh!*" William screamed.

"Mr. William!" I shouted.

The demon's claw pierced his head, marking his second death.

This sounded kind of evil, but from his second death onward, just one death wasn't enough to wake him up.

"*Aaargh!*"

His limbs were torn apart, marking his third death.

"Damn it… damn it! *Kgh…*"

His fourth and fifth deaths came swiftly.

"*Krrrrrr…*"

His neck was pierced, so he couldn't scream. This marked his sixth death.

Then, his seventh death came and his tenth… death.

“Why?! Damn it! You bastard! *Ahhhhhhhhh!*” William yelled.

Twelfth, thirteenth, fifteenth, twentieth, twenty-seventh…

Tonight’s dream ended with his thirty-second death.

When I saw Will the next morning…

‘His face is filled with fear.’

He was basically in the worst condition possible.

The sight told me that breaking someone was easier than fortifying them. His once-clean face was marred with anxiety, and there were huge bags beneath his eyes.

There was no need for me to read his mind to know that he was afraid of entering that hell again upon falling asleep. He prayed to the Goddess of Flower and Fertility more often than usual. He no longer smiled, and he was really on edge.

He seemed like he would rather die and put an end to all this pain, but unfortunately, he was capable of regressing infinitely; at least, he could do that in my dream.

‘I wonder if he’ll show a different reaction… upon dying five hundred times.’

CHAPTER 1165
INTERNAL STABILITY (4)

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young! This way!” William shouted.

“Okay.”

On the fifty-third try, he immediately chose to run as soon as the loop began.

“*Aaaargh!*”

In the end, he died, but he held out for a pretty long time.

I liked his destination. The fact that he immediately ran toward the temple of the Flower and Fertility told me that he was thinking of a way to escape this hell.

From his point of view, he probably thought that it wasn’t a complete loss. After all, he managed to do something before dying.

“Mr. William!” I called out.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young… *ugh…”* William groaned.

On his fifty-fifth try, excessive bleeding was the cause of his death.

It ended with him watching me getting dragged away while he was dying.

“*Aaaaargh!*”

On his sixty-seventh try, I could feel William’s frustration because he charged at the demon with his sword in hand.

However, he couldn’t land an effective attack. Like his first death, he was split

in half, meeting a tragic end.

On his eighty-ninth try, he seemed to be thinking a little more logically, but he knew better than anyone that it was a meaningless struggle.

Thinking that all of this was just warm-up, I decided to just watch him until his hundredth death, but his progress was slower than I thought.

'I'm hoping it ends within five hundred deaths.'

The problem was that he was still showing no signs of becoming even stronger despite dying a hundred and thirty times.

'Maybe this isn't right.'

I couldn't help but think that way because Will was gradually becoming a wreck.

"*Uh… uh…*"

In the real world, only two days had passed. Of course, many things happened inside the dream, but it seemed like he had been completely ruined in just two days, so I wasn't feeling really good about this.

I thought this infinite regression event would help Will overcome his limits—both mentally and physically—but it seemed like he ended up developing a mental illness instead.

First of all…

'He's not letting go of his sword.'

He usually wore basic armor, but his habit had become a lot worse.

It was like he was relying on his armor to save his life.

To make things worse, he always had his hand on the hilt of his sword so that

he could unsheathe his sword as quickly as possible. His left hand was touching his sword even while he was eating. His hand would still be on his sword even during meetings.

Secondly, he would suddenly feel dizzy and feel suffocated. He vomited often as well. He was having a hard time eating, and he was also afraid of going into dark areas. His third symptom was that he spent most of his time in the temple of the Flower and Fertility.

He had always been a religious person, but he started praying to the Goddess of Flower and Fertility for an unusually long time.

Besides these, there were many other symptoms, but since I wasn't a psychiatrist, I couldn't diagnose him properly.

However, the biggest problem was that he wasn't aware of the issue.

'Ah, man. I hope he doesn't end up being a fool in a wheelchair.'

Others would have lost their minds before dying thirty times. I executed this plan because I believed in Will's steel-like mind and his unwavering belief that seemed like it would never kneel before anyone.

'I'm doing all of this because I care a lot about you… '

Of course I was worried, but if this was enough to make him lose his sanity, then Rohen basically had no hope from the start.

"Mr. William," I said with my hand on his shoulder.

William looked back with a surprised look. Seeing him immediately place his hand on his sword made me think that he was going to cause a big problem eventually. When he saw that I was the one who grabbed him, he took a deep breath to calm himself down.

"Yes?"

“Are you okay?” I asked.

“Yes, I’m… fine,” William answered hesitantly.

‘You don’t look fine. How are you going to go through the meeting in this condition?’

The things happening in the dream were problematic, but what was going on around Saint Bell was pretty serious as well.

The Monarch of Sunset had given us a grace period of one week, but the people of Rohen had already decided to face their fears.

Sun Hee-Young had to have realized that the humans were going to confront them, as she made the undead surround Saint Bell.

There were issues with supplies and reinforcement, and the fact that we had to engage in a defensive battle despite the significant difference in power was enough to make people nervous.

The one thing I was relieved about was that the people hadn’t been neglecting their tasks.

‘But they seem to be neglecting them today.’

“How are the preparations for the defense war coming along?” I asked.

“I think the walls will be done in time, Commander,” Emilia answered.

“That’s good,” I said.

“However, the mages are complaining about feeling mentally exhausted. They need enough rest before going into battle—”

“Okay, please make sure they get enough rest, Miss Emilia,” I interrupted her.

“Okay.”

“Any word from Arhendel?” I asked.

“Unfortunately, no…” Emilia answered.

“I see. In that case… I think we should walk around Saint Bell again today,” I suggested.

Of course, most of the preparations were complete.

This defense war was part of Operation: Dawn, so we didn’t need a lot of time to do the briefing.

The troops, excluding a few special units, were already familiar with their duties.

The troops had been building, maintaining, and repairing the walls over the past few days. The members of the command center, including myself, had other tasks we needed to handle.

‘Like encouraging the troops… ‘

Like a candidate running in an election, I patrolled the mission zones and took care of the troops. I would often grab their hands while telling them not to lose hope.

Of course, suppressing unnecessary rumors and controversies was part of my job. The 8-hour criminals had proven the effectiveness of the Monarch of Sunset’s plan.

It was impossible to end that controversy alone. The command center kept telling people that demons would never negotiate and that I was the hope of mankind.

Fortunately, their actions were effective.

‘Look at their eyes. It’s like they’re looking at their savior.’

Of course, I couldn't have done this by myself.

'It's a good thing that we didn't kill them.'

The idiots had almost died at the hands of Jo Hye-Jin, and they were spreading the fact that demons would never negotiate with them.

Considering that their goal was to protect Rohen, it wouldn't be surprising for them to become desperate in response to that kind of manipulation. Of course, they probably wanted to rid themselves of guilt or seek forgiveness, but deep down, their main focus was protecting Rohen.

'You guys are still going to die.'

They were already on my bad side.

Anyway, the chaos continued, and the command center kept holding meetings to calm everyone's nerves. Every action of a master from a famous familia or a named player had a lot of weight at the moment, but…

'What's with his eyes? They look completely empty.'

William was behaving in a way that could easily make soldiers distrust him.

'His condition is really bad today.'

"What do you think about the wall, Mr. Lee Ki-Young?" Emilia asked.

"I think this is perfect, Miss Emilia. I can see… how hard the soldiers worked… If I could, I would hold the hands of everyone, but I'm sad that I can't do that," I answered.

"…"

"This wall all of you built will be remembered as the wall that protected Rohen in the future," I said.

"…"

"I know that you're worried, but at times like this, you must cling to hope even more. Thank you very much, everyone. I'm really thankful to everyone who joined this fight to protect Rohen."

I said this while grabbing the hands of the soldiers with perfect discipline.

Due to the situation, I couldn't really create a scene of being hugged by passionate supporters, but moving around with my adjutants was enough to boost their morale.

"Rohen will win no matter what. I firmly believe that together, you, I, and humanity will overcome this crisis. Mr. William, please say a few words," I said.

"…"

'You shouldn't have come if you were going to act like this. I'm sure that'll help them dream of a Rohen full of hope.'

William was staring at a strange place with a pale face.

After hearing my voice, he came back to his senses and muttered, "Thank you… everyone… for your hard work. Yes… thank you…"

'That's it?'

It'd be strange if they couldn't realize that something was wrong with William.

Emilia and the members of the Family and Fertility familia had been asking me about William's condition. Since it would be more problematic for ordinary soldiers than the command center…

"Mr. William, I think it's best… if you take a break," I suggested.

"…"

"Mr. William?" I said.

"Yes? D-Did you say something? I'm sorry, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. I just—"

"I said I think it's best if you take a break. Y-You seem kind of exhausted," I interrupted him.

"No, I'm… fine. More importantly, about tonight…" William said.

"Right, I think it's best if we move according to the path you explained. There was clearly some progress…" I said.

"When we ran toward the Flower and Fertility Temple. A-Actually… I think you're right, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. I think it's best… if I make preparations for tonight… After praying to the goddess… Yes… I should probably do that," William mumbled.

I saw him walking while spacing out. Would it be strange for me to think that he was leaving to escape reality rather than prepare for tonight? I was worried that he was going to do something drastic… but it wasn't the case.

This was a bit unexpected…

"Look at him…"

— Oppa, I think he's trying his best to avoid falling asleep.

"So he's just going to leave me alone."

— I knew this was going to happen. I'm sure he wants to rest for at least a day. He looked like he could feel himself falling apart… and a lot of things were happening at once. But if you really want to, I can make him go to sleep… What should we do?

"Just leave him alone. With his personality, this might be more effective," I

answered.

— Well… that's true.

I hadn't expected that Will would hold out and refrain from sleeping. He knew this wasn't a real solution, but he was so terrified that he couldn't make a reasonable decision.

'The defense war will start soon, so I'm sure he wants to take care of himself before then. Above all, he's probably scared to sleep.'

Upon falling asleep, he'd die over and over again. He would have to withstand the pain of hundreds of deaths at the hands of the demon he despised so much, so I would instead be worried if he were calm about all of this.

In his eyes, that dream probably felt more like hell than hell itself.

'But did you know? With your personality, reality can be more hellish for you.'

* * *

As expected, William looked anxious as he said, "Mr. Lee Ki-Young… yesterday…"

"I'm really… really… glad, Mr. William," I said.

"Excuse me?" he asked.

"Thankfully… thankfully, it didn't seem to have affected you, Mr. William. I was worried that you might've experienced something awful because of me…" I told him.

"…"

"I'm really… glad. Thanks to you… I think the demon's influence… has decreased," I said.

I looked at him as if I were genuinely worried about him.

The unwavering and innocent air emanating from me was enough to make his arms tremble.

"…"

Will looked like he was hating himself.

CHAPTER 1166
INTERNAL STABILITY (5)

'How… how is he able to smile?'

"Thankfully… thankfully, it didn't seem to have affected you, Mr. William. I was worried that you might've experienced something awful because of me…" Lee Ki-Young said.

'How is this man able to act like nothing's wrong?'

"I'm really… glad. Thanks to you… I think the demon's influence… has decreased," he added.

An overwhelming sense of self-hatred and guilt consumed my mind.

I[1] felt like insects were gnawing away at my heart as I sat down on a chair while staring into space. I didn't get any sleep last night, but I didn't feel tired.

Perhaps it was because I was relieved about the fact that I managed to escape that hell, but I felt like I was finally able to relax after a long time. Of course, I wasn't feeling comfortable. Although I was relieved, a part of my heart felt like it was rotting away.

'I wonder how I looked like.'

I wondered how I looked in front of the one comforting me and saying that they were relieved to see that I hadn't experienced something awful. Actually, I couldn't even remember our conversation, so it'd be strange if I could remember what I looked like earlier.

Without realizing it, I turned and saw bottles of alcohol neatly arranged on the desk.

Half of them were empty, and the sight wasn't comforting at all.

It was something I used to love so much, but despite thinking that it would provide me with some comfort, the taste of alcohol was so bitter that I couldn't stand it at all.

And that was when a thought popped into my head.

'I wasn't a strong person.'

I thought I had a strong will, but it turned out that my will was *this* weak.

I was a scummy human with no shame or pride in the face of death.

I was afraid.

I knew that I couldn't be acting like this, but I was afraid. The endless pain, the fear of death, and the fact that I would have to spend time in the neverending nightmare was unimaginably painful.

That was why it was hard for me to understand…

'How… how is he able to… smile like that?'

Was he not scared at all?

He was someone who broke down when others died, so how could he be so indifferent about his own death?

That was the key question.

Of course, I couldn't understand it, as I thought I could overcome it as well.

I was determined not to kneel before a nightmare, but it didn't take long for me to realize that it was impossible. My determination was completely destroyed in just two days, and it was to the point that I resented Lee Ki-Young.

My promise to fight together with him faded away with the painful deaths, and my sympathy turned into resentment.

At this rate, I was sure I'd really end up resenting him.

"Damn it…" I muttered.

I looked out the window, and my gaze was fixated on one person. I saw him being surrounded by soldiers and talking about various topics with them. It was a sight I saw every day. He cheered for the troops and prayed for those who were injured.

"The Goddess of Flower and Fertility is watching over us."

He encouraged the fallen and fearful to help them rise and move forward together.

"I know it's hard… but please don't lose hope," Lee Ki-Young said.

"Okay."

"Humanity has not lost yet. If we combine our faith and strength, I'm confident we'll be able to overcome this crisis together," he added.

It seemed like a cliched line, but his words were different because he was sincere.

"Sincere" was the best word to describe Lee Ki-Young.

Everything about him was sincere, and everyone, including myself, was aware of that. He was the type of person who couldn't fake anything, and he had been living a life with no falsehoods whatsoever.

Lee Ki-Young was sincere. He had never made any attempts to hide his innocence and clumsiness. He also wasn't afraid of hiding his pain or fear.

He truly had faith—

“The Goddess of Flower and Fertility will not abandon us,” Lee Ki-Young said.

—that the Goddess of Flower and Fertility and the other gods wouldn’t abandon us.

“How could I not be scared? Just like all of you, I’m scared of all of this, but that’s why I believe this fight is important,” Lee Ki-Young added.

“…”

“I’m sure we can win,” Lee Ki-Young said.

—that we can win.

“Even if I die, I’m sure my death won’t be in vain,” he said.

—that his death will never be in vain.

When I came back to my senses, I noticed that I was crying.

I could see tears falling from my eyes, and they were being reflected on the window.

I had no idea that I had been drinking one bottle of liquor after another.

When I came back to my senses again, I realized that I was talking before him. I knew it looked bad to rely on alcohol for courage, but couldn’t muster any courage while sober, so I had no choice but to drink.

“What brings you here at this late hour?” Lee Ki-Young asked.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young,” I said.

“Yes?”

“Aren’t you afraid?” I asked.

“I’m sorry? What are you saying all of a sudden… I don’t really understand…

Mr. William. Are you okay?" he asked.

"Aren't you… afraid of the nightmare?" I clarified.

"…"

"How… how are you able to smile?" I asked.

"…"

"How are you able to hold on to the thread of hope despite experiencing all that pain? Isn't it difficult? The current situation… the enemies lurking outside are waiting to invade Saint Bell at any moment. Don't these situations… worry you?" I asked.

"Excuse me?" he asked.

"Why… why aren't you blaming me? Why… when I ran away…" I questioned.

"What… are you saying…"

"You already know that I-I lied… I lied to run away from that nightmare… I'm sure you're already aware of that," I told him.

I didn't even know what I was saying.

"Why did you trust me? Why didn't you question me… and offer me comfort instead? I'm weak, so I don't know anything. I wanted to become stronger… but I couldn't. I told you to rely on me as if I were someone worth relying on, but… I… I couldn't endure it.

"I couldn't endure… the nightmare. How… how is it that you can still smile despite knowing you'll die hundreds of times today?" I asked.

It wasn't like me to act this way.

I was drunk, but I acted like a child throwing a tantrum.

Despite knowing that my actions were wrong, I couldn't stop at all. The figure before had to be surprised as well because he remained silent for a while.

Seeing him contemplating for a while made me think that he was searching for an answer.

"I-I'm not sure."

"…"

I was sure he had never thought about it, and I understood why.

In some ways, it was a dumb question. He was just *that* type of person, so he probably never felt the need to think about it.

And that was when I heard the answer he had taken his time to think about…

Despite being drunk, his answer still caught me off guard.

"…"

"If I had to give you an answer, I think it's because of faith."

"Pardon?"

"True faith," Lee Ki-Young said.

"…"

"I have faith that both humanity and I will be able to overcome this trial. Of course, it's hard because there will be painful times, and there will be times when I will doubt myself, but I have faith. I know it's easier said than done, but I believe in the childish fairy tale that light will triumph one day," Lee Ki-Young explained.

'Yeah, I already knew the answer. I probably just asked because I wanted to

hear it directly from him.'

"…"

"I truly believe this story will end with, 'Everyone lived happily ever after.'"

"That's… absurd, isn't it…" I asked.

"I'm not someone who can always smile calmly through pain and hardship, unlike what you think of me, Mr. William. Just like others, I feel pain, fear death, and grieve over pain," Lee Ki-Young said.

"…"

"That might be the reason why I want to believe even more," Lee Ki-Young added.

"…"

"Having that kind of faith helps it go away. My anxiety about tomorrow, my fear of the nightmare, and the suspicion of whether I'm walking down the right path or not. All of it goes away," Lee Ki-Young said.

There was certainty in his eyes.

Rather than being seen as immature for believing that a story that only appeared in fairy tales would happen in real life, I could feel confidence from him. He had faith that the light wouldn't go out, and he wouldn't let it go out.

I could tell that he truly believed in himself.

It was hard to explain it, but he seemed certain that his faith would never fade.

It was like he already knew that he would never give up, no matter the challenges or difficulties.

'How is he able to think like that… '

I couldn't stop questioning him because he was completely different from me, but I could feel what he was trying to say. It felt as though I had caught a glimpse of why he could smile, even in the midst of this nightmare.

"I don't know if I'll be able to think like you…" I paused.

"…"

"But I want to believe as well," I continued.

"Yes, I'm sure… you can do it," Lee Ki-Young said.

"I want to believe… that everything will be resolved one day and that we'll get the 'Everyone lived happily ever after' type of ending," I said.

"Me, too."

"I want to believe that I can overcome this hardship. No, I believe it," I said with determination.

Believing in myself was important, and believing in what I had was important as well.

I had no idea when it started, but it felt like a lot of time had passed since I stopped believing in myself.

"I feel… kind of relieved," Lee Ki-Young commented.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," I said.

"No, it's nothing you need to apologize for. You have no idea how relieved I am that you told me that. I was actually kind of scared," Lee Ki-Young said.

"…"

"Thinking that I'll be spending time alone in that place again," Lee Ki-Young

confessed.

"…"

"I feel kind of bad for telling you this, but thinking that there's someone I can share my pain with… makes me feel reassured," Lee Ki-Young continued.

"*Haha…"* I laughed.

"Of course, before that, you need to sober up…" Lee Ki-Young suggested.

"Yes, of course," I said.

And…

'Believe.'

The world of nightmares, now just one step away, appeared before me.

"This way, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," I said.

"Okay."

'Believe, believe in myself. If I can't believe in myself, then believe in him.'

'Let's have faith that this will have the 'Everyone lived happily ever after' ending.'

* * *

— Oppa… when are you going to tell Will about your so-called terminal illness?

"Later, and that's not something that should be forced. It should come out naturally," I[2] answered.

1. William’s POV ☜

2. Lee Ki-Young’s POV ☜

CHAPTER 1167
CRIMSON FLOWER (1)

— Oppa… when are you going to tell Will about your so-called terminal illness?

"Later, and that's not something that should be forced. It should come out naturally," I answered.

— I don't think the "Everyone lived happily ever after" ending is going to happen. I feel really bad for him.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

— What? Once things are done here, you won't have a reason to stay in Rohen anymore. Weren't you just thinking of this place as a holy power factory?

"You're not wrong," I answered.

— That's why I feel bad. Even if things work out here, it won't be a happy ending for everyone. I guarantee that once everything here is over, he's going to become an alcoholic again. Actually, I think he's an alcoholic now.

'That's true.'

Of course, it had nothing to do with me. Honestly, if all it took to save Rohen was William ending up an alcoholic, it'd be a pretty good deal.

Unfortunately, he had to overcome this trial.

'If he dies here, it will all be for nothing.'

The atmosphere was pretty positive…

We had seen time and time again that those who had conquered their fears would never lose. Kim Hyun-Sung was living proof that determination alone could make someone stronger.

Those considered geniuses knew that breaking through mental barriers was more significant than surpassing physical ones. It was especially true for those who were already testing the limits of what humans could achieve.

I couldn't say that consistent self-development, like stamina training or swordsmanship, wasn't helpful, but it couldn't show immediate results.

Those who had reached their limits needed a certain something, and it wasn't daily training. Whatever William needed, it had to be able to help him overcome the wall before him. I was certain nothing beyond that would help him.

'His rationality is a bit of a problem.'

His obsessive tendencies had proven it to me. He always woke up at the same time, his room always had to be organized, and he disliked deviating from his planned daily routine. Obviously, that side of him was clearly shown on the battlefield as well.

His swordsmanship was so orderly that the nickname "Basic" suited him perfectly. His sword style felt almost too textbook-like.

There was a reason Woo Hyo-Yeol thought that he could beat William.

Unfortunately, William was clearly different from Templar Gen, who stayed true to the basics as well. I felt bad for saying this, but…

'You've had a sheltered upbringing.'

Like a delicate flower in a greenhouse, he seemed like a wealthy young master training in the swordsmanship of a noble family.

He needed to struggle. He needed to realize that he was weak, and he had to

roll around in the mud at least once. I needed to make him grit his teeth, roll on the ground, and let go of some of his obsessive tendencies.

He needed sheer determination and the grit to take his opponent's life, even if it meant losing an arm.

'Of course… '

His identity had to stay the same.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young, this way," William instructed.

"Okay."

'Being rational is your strength, so I'm not saying you need to throw that part of you away. You must carry that with you. You have to determine the best way to carry that with you.'

"I think it's best if we move to a location where we can fight our opponent," William suggested.

"Understood," I said.

"Do you remember the time we encountered the demon at the goddess's temple?" William asked.

"Yes, of course," I replied.

" I think we should fight in the alleyway next to the temple," William said.

"What if we head to a place where we can take cover? Fighting in an open area with cover might be more—"

"No. As you know, I'm too weak to fight against that demon. The demon is much stronger than I am," William argued.

"…"

“Running away won’t help. I need to train so that I can at least react to its attack,” William said.

‘That’s right. I like that mindset.’

“If I can at least block its claws with my sword…” William trailed off.

“You can do it,” I encouraged him.

‘Being thorough and sensitive are both your strengths.’

It was rare. At a certain level, people’s sensitivity often dropped.

William’s swordsmanship was as precise and as accurate as a machine.

Blocking claws with a sword was as ridiculous as blocking one needle with another, but this villain was specially designed for that. Making the impossible possible was the key point of this plan.

I saw Will facing the demon.

We had decided that this was going to be the first round.

The demon fired its claws, and William stared right at its nails with his eyes wide open.

I was sure he was aware through years of experience that blocking the nails with his sword would break it. He knew that blocking with the surface or on its side wouldn’t work and that the nails could only be blocked using concentrated mana.

He got rid of the mana protecting his body to increase his speed. I saw him concentrating all of his mana on the tip of his sword for a devastating single attack.

As soon the nails were close enough, he swung his sword.

And the first round ended just like that…

The second round's result wasn't any different from the first round, but he continued to stare at the nails until they pierced his skull. He seemed to be thinking about what went wrong and why he couldn't see the nails.

The third round began.

William looked anxious, but he didn't run or choose a different way to face the demon.

The fourth round began.

The result was no different.

The fifth round began.

The result was no different from before.

The eleventh round started.

The result hadn't changed at all.

The twenty-third round commenced, but the result was still the same.

The thirty-fifth round started; the result hadn't changed.

The forty-eighth round commenced, and the result remained unchanged.

The 115th round started and—

"*Hahahahaha!*"

—William succeeded in blocking the demon's attack with his own efforts.

The 116th round began.

Although William had failed in the previous round, he didn't get discouraged.

He faced the demon while mumbling something to himself. I believed it was his own way of recalling what he felt during the previous round.

The one hundred and seventeenth round commenced.

William succeeded in blocking the demon's attack once again. Despite getting hit by the next attack, William's eyes remained locked on his opponent's claws. William didn't close his eyes until the nails pierced his eyes.

The 182nd round began.

William seemed exhausted because he wasn't making any progress, but the look in his eyes remained the same.

"It will end with 'Everyone lived happily ever after.' No matter what," William said.

"Yes, I have faith in that as well," I said.

The 210th round commenced.

William drove his sword into the demon's lung.

I was sure he could feel that he was growing stronger. He could definitely feel that more than anyone. The attack he couldn't see in the beginning was now visible in his eyes, and he could finally react to the demon's movements.

William looked like he was growing more and more confident.

He was finally aware that it wasn't just luck; he knew he could block its attacks.

The 233rd round started.

The stage had changed, but it wasn't because we were running away.

William thought he needed space to retreat.

For Will, who needed to block ten nails with one attack, it was an unavoidable choice.

While moving seven steps backward, Will blocked the demon's attacks.

He was smiling. He couldn't block the remaining three nails, so they pierced his heart, but he was clearly smiling.

It was like he was saying that time was on his side, and it was true.

Time *really* was on his side.

The 287th round began.

William's style changed, but not in the direction I wanted it to go. After repeatedly confronting death and the goal being so close to him, he had become a bit more aggressive.

The strategy of accepting minor losses to gain a major victory wasn't a bad idea.

That kind of determination was what I initially expected from him, but what I wanted was his mindset to change rather than his actions.

The curtains to the 329th round opened, and we discussed many things before encountering the demon. We talked about our faith in the Goddess of Flower and Fertility, about life, and the things we were going to do after the war.

We talked a lot about whether we'd become slightly better people after the war and everything. William nodded, and he seemed to be crying a little, but he didn't make it noticeable.

He stared at his sword, seemingly vowing that he wouldn't change beyond what was necessary.

The 399th round started.

“I think I know,” William said.

“Pardon?”

“I think I finally know why the goddess sent me here. She probably thought that this was another trial I needed to overcome,” William answered.

“…”

“I was really afraid of dying, but I’m no longer scared. The thing I thought was impossible to reach was now reachable. I’m not saying this because I’m arrogant or speaking optimistically about all this, but I think… I think I’m getting stronger, Mr. Lee Ki-Young,” William continued.

“I see,” I said.

“Both physically and mentally,” William added.

“I see that as well,” I said.

“I’m getting stronger,” William repeated.

He wasn’t being arrogant or haughty.

The 431st round commenced.

Will’s sword managed to pierce the demon’s throat, but his attack wasn’t powerful enough to kill it.

“*Aaaaargh!*”

I saw him drenched in blood, but the glint of determination was still in his eyes.

At this point, the two had already exchanged more than a hundred moves.

William roared and swung his sword. The two clashed, and I heard something streaking across the skies. He seemed to be thinking that he could win if he just took one step forward, and I felt the same way.

The 444th round started, and there weren't many changes, but William had become extremely calm.

He looked at his sword quietly and nodded with certainty.

From the 44th round onward, his attacks were landing with increasing frequency. Whenever his attacks weren't working, William would concentrate all of his mana on the tip of his sword and go all out.

I could see that he was starting to realize his core issues.

The 478th round began…

The demon's attack no longer worked on William, but William simply stared at the demon without saying anything.

The 489th round commenced, and there were no changes.

William was spending more and more time thinking deeply about something. He seemed to be thinking about many different thoughts, so all I did was watch him.

After thinking for quite some time, he turned to me and asked, "Can I try a few more times?"

He seemed certain that he could kill the demon, and I agreed with his request. I wondered if there was any point in continuing this, but William seemed to be thinking that there was more to gain, so I agreed.

"Yes, of course."

The 491st round started…

William swung his sword. He seemed dissatisfied with something… and then he died.

The 492nd round commenced…

William swung his sword. He seemed dissatisfied with something… and then he died.

The 493rd round began…

William swung his sword. He seemed dissatisfied with something… and then he died.

The 497th round commenced…

William swung his sword. He seemed dissatisfied with something… and then he died.

The 500th round started…

William swung his sword. He nodded… and then he died.

Finally, on the 501st round…

William drew a crimson flower with his sword.

He was looking down at his hand.

I smiled at the sight, and he smiled as well.

William had drawn a crimson flower with his sword.

CHAPTER 1168
CRIMSON FLOWER (2)

'It's done.'

This was better than I thought.

'I knew you could do it. I believed in you, Will.'

The world shrouded by an ashen sunset cracked open like a mirror.

The world that I had created was collapsing.

The mise en scene felt kind of awkward, but there was an issue with the funds, so it couldn't be helped. It seemed trivial in the eyes of a professional, but that wasn't the case for William.

As expected, I saw him quietly looking at the collapsing world.

He seemed to be feeling a mix of emotions, but a sense of achievement seemed to be what he was feeling the most. However, from his point of view, it wasn't as simple as describing it as a sense of achievement.

This was a dream world, but this was basically another world.

This was the 501st round, but in addition to the rounds before the reset, he had spent more than just 501 rounds.

The fear he felt in the beginning and the joy he felt in the final moments…

He cried, laughed, and felt sad.

He also felt angry and happy.

William died and grew stronger here.

He had abandoned himself here and had found himself here.

He could no longer easily abandon the place that made him feel every single emotion out there.

“It’s over,” I said.

“No, not exactly. I have a feeling that this is only the beginning,” William said.

“Yes, you’re right. Saying this is only the beginning is a more fitting description,” I agreed.

“There are still many enemies we must fight both here and in the real world,” William said as he looked up at the sky quietly.

As the world crumbled in an almost unreal way, a huge black shadow appeared on the other side. It was trying to extend its hand out slowly. In the lore, that shadow… was a being slumbering within the Saint of Flower and Fertility.

It was the one that started this tragedy and ended the world.

Luckily, the being was unable to spread its influence in the collapsing world.

Ultimately, this event served to show that by defeating the demon, William had reduced its influence.

The being that emitted an overwhelming sense of dominance, even though we were simply looking at it, moved once again to the edge of the dream, but its presence was still there.

The phantom of the Great Ancient Demon, a manifestation of sheer madness, malice, and terror, danced before my eyes.

“So… that’s the being that’s sealed inside you,” William said.

“That’s right,” I said.

“We can’t defeat it,” William said.

“…”

“At least not now,” William added.

‘Look at him acting all confident.’

“That being will probably keep testing you. Like how it created this dream, it will approach you again. It will drill a hole in your heart… and will keep gnawing away at your heart,” he warned.

“When that time comes… we can probably defeat it. Back then, I’m uncertain, but now, I feel like something has changed. I’m embarrassed to say this since you’re the one who worked the hardest…” I told him.

“That’s not true. I believe you fought the demon in your own way, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. If you hadn’t been here, I would have crumbled down instead of this dream world,” William said.

“Excuse me? I did? But I—”

“No matter how I explain it, you probably won’t understand, and I simply don’t have the words to explain it. However, I want you to know that I was able to overcome it because of you,” William interrupted me.

‘Yeah, yeah. I know how you feel.’

However, I had to show that I was curious and had no idea what he was talking about.

‘You’re the one who fought and claimed victory, so why are you saying it was thanks to me?’

I showed him that kind of expression because Flower Ki-Young was innocent

when it came to that kind of stuff. After spouting nonsense like a Zen riddle, he smiled quietly as he looked at my face.

"The light… doesn't just shine by itself."

'So you're saying that you're shining as well because I'm shining.'

I questioned why he couldn't just say that, but I realized why he said that. The slow-witted twenty-three-year-old Flower Ki-Young needed time to realize that he was the light in that sentence, so William likely decided it was better to end it like this.

'Not bad.'

It was good to have many conversations, but a concise ending like this wasn't so bad, either.

I had set up plenty of hints for the next villain, and the ending, which served as a reminder that the fight was far from over with the giant enemy on the horizon, felt just right.

It was a message that there were many more battles to come and that constantly growing stronger was essential. Of course, I needed to find a way to escape Rohen before fighting that being, but honestly, I just wanted him to stay focused during this war.

"Thank you again," William said.

"Me too," I said.

"And… it's a good morning," William said.

"Yes, it is a good morning," I said.

With that, I quietly opened my eyes and greeted the morning.

"…"

'I'm really exhausted.'

It felt like I hadn't gotten enough sleep.

I looked outside the window and saw William quietly watching the enemies from on top of the wall. It wasn't the shattered dream world, but the one where there were still things left to protect. He quietly looked up at the sky.

'He must've woken up before me.'

His face showed a subtle change in his mood, and it caught my attention.

Actually, it felt like he had changed overnight. Of course, it was a natural change. He experienced death over five hundred times, so it'd be strange if he hadn't changed.

He spoke less, and his gaze had changed slightly.

Obviously, I wasn't the only one who noticed it.

'He seems kind of awkward, right?'

The members of the Flower and Fertility Familia probably felt that something was out of place, but they couldn't quite point it out.

They had spent more time with him than I had, so I was sure they felt that something about William had changed. It made them feel estranged from William. After all, William's aura and energy had changed.

"Mr. William, did you…" someone trailed off.

"Please continue," William said.

"No, it's nothing," they said.

That was the kind of conversation I heard…

'I'm sure Will doesn't even know how he changed.'

I looked away and continued with my usual routine. I washed up, picked out my clothes, and went outside. Then, I saw a Saint Bell that was quieter than usual.

'It started.'

It was like the calm before the storm. It was a feeling that I couldn't quite put into words—it was both familiar and unfamiliar. It had been announced, but I was sure they still couldn't quite accept the reality.

It was a war with no retreat.

Everyone had their own way of preparing for the war.

Some were checking their armor for the last time while others were writing their will.

Friends gathered and talked, while some laughed and chatted without thinking much about the upcoming war. Some also talked about the things that would happen after this.

There were also people praying fervently.

The commanders had no intention of stopping those who were hanging out together.

They respected everyone's way of spending their final moments, and rather than disciplining them, they were being considerate.

The situation was kind of different from when we took back Saint Bell.

Unlike the time when people were very hopeful, the soldiers feared that they could die in this war, and they weren't wrong to think that way.

I was sure everyone who saw the beings that Sun Hee-Young had abandoned a week ago all thought that it was impossible to win and that Saint Bell could probably be mankind's final battlefield.

It wasn't just the ordinary soldiers who felt this way. The leaders of the familias and the command center were also aware of the difference in strength and were hoping for a miracle.

'That's why I brought it. The miracle.'

Speak of the devil. William immediately made an appearance…

'You're the miracle, Will.'

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young," William greeted.

"*Ah!* Mr. William. How are you feeling?" I asked.

"All the matters that were brought up have been taken care of. I'm kind of worried about the soldiers' morale, but… we received word from Arhendel as well, so I think we should expect to receive good news," William answered.

"*Whoo*, that's a relief," I said.

"Yes. It felt really short but long at the same time. Don't you agree?" William asked.

"You're right. I can't believe it's already been a week since we retook Saint Bell. I'm kind of surprised," I replied.

"That's true."

"…"

"…"

"Do you think we'll win?" William asked.

"Yes, we must," I answered.

The enemies were showing up on the horizon.

The pitch-black, undead monsters were getting closer and closer.

Was I just imagining things, or were there more compared to the last time we saw them? I even felt like there were more varieties of them. The sight of those creatures rising from the black swamp triggered a feeling of disgust within me.

“No, we’ll win,” I said.

There were so many of them that I wouldn’t be surprised if people felt like vomiting at the sight of them, just like when we first saw them.

[The price for betraying his kindness is death.]

Sun Hee-Young’s echoed voice along with a shrill cry.

[The price for betraying his kindness is death. Death.]

“…” Sun Hee-Young’s voice reverberated throughout the skies.

I glanced over at William again.

‘He had grown pretty strong. Not bad. He learned a finishing move, and more importantly, he managed to improve his skills.’

We could handle this fight.

I wasn’t the only one who thought that way because William raised his sword and roared, “Raise your swords! Sons and daughters of Rohen!”

William’s voice was overflowing with determination.

[Die while resenting your own ignorance and wickedness, insects of Rohen.]

‘Hee-Young?’

[We won’t let you die peacefully. We will grant you eternal suffering until you speak of the sins you committed.]

‘Her choice of words is kind of harsh… ‘

[The price for betraying his kindness is death.]

A massive bone dragon rose from the swamp of pitch-black holy power.

“*Roooooooooooooooooooooar!*”

A violent tremor ran across everything as if there were a powerful earthquake.

“Prepare for battle!”

“Prepare for battle!”

“Prepare for battle!”

The messengers ran across the wall while waving flags.

The ones who were unconsciously repeating the words, “Prepare for battle,” were now staring at the sky with faces full of despair.

A clump of black energy gathered on the bone dragon’s mouth as it flapped its massive wings and looked down at Saint Bell.

The clump of energy was powerful enough to destroy the walls of Saint Bell, but before it could be unleashed, eight crimson flowers manifested and adorned the skies.

“*Aaaah!*”

“What the… What… is thiiiiis…”

What do you mean?

‘The hero is making his grand entrance.’

Perhaps he still hadn’t gotten used to it, as he looked a bit awkward.

However, he managed to land gracefully on the ground, and I saw him nodding to himself.

CHAPTER 1169
CRIMSON FLOWER (3)

'Nice.'

Loud cheering echoed throughout the battlefield, and hope appeared on the faces of the anxious and worried soldiers.

'The timing was great.'

Naturally, I thought this was more effective than a needlessly long speech since these people had actually been looking forward to this kind of event.

There was no need for me to explain the importance of morale on a battlefield. The good thing was that it only took us a few seconds to raise their morale, which had plummeted to the ground upon witnessing the bone dragon.

"*Yaaaaaaaaaaaah!*"

"We can do it! We can do it!"

If this were a full-out war instead of a siege, I would order the troops to charge by now. Obviously, no commander was stupid enough to stay idle in this kind of atmosphere.

I immediately looked at Ha-Yan and said, "Miss Ha-Yan."

"…!"

Jung Ha-Yan cast the spell she chanted, and a massive fireball manifested.

The giant fireball descended and devoured the forsaken creatures on the ground.

Before the fireball could even touch the ground, the forsaken ones had already been reduced to ashes, and the sight made me realize that Jung Ha-Yan's fireball possessed lethality and destructiveness far beyond an ordinary fireball.

Actually, there was a chance that she focused on increasing the spell's firepower, as the fireball didn't actually look like a fireball.

Unlike ordinary mages who enjoyed creating shapes for their spells, Jung Ha-Yan didn't bother imagining its shape.

Rather than creating a tiger made out of fire, a wolf made out of lightning, or a bird made out of wind, Jung Ha-Yan enjoyed spells with a simple shape.

She used simple shapes like spheres, cones, and cubes, but the concentration of mana within them was far greater than those fancy ones. If I were to exaggerate a bit, I'd say it looked like a miniature sun had descended.

Boooooooooooooooom!

A deafening explosion echoed, and hope appeared in the eyes of the allied soldiers who witnessed the holy light melt about one-third of the enemy soldiers.

'Back on the continent, she'd casually drop meteors while I enjoyed a cup of tea.'

Jung Ha-Yan, whose abilities were under the effects of the Rohen patch, wasn't strong enough to put on that kind of performance just yet. Undead monsters rose up from the black swamp, but the allied soldiers seemed unaffected by the sight.

Their eyes were no longer filled with fear or hopelessness.

"We can win…"

"Prepare for battle! Ready the arrows! You bastards! Who's still not paying

attention?!”

“We can win! You idiots! Focus! They’re coming!”

“Fire.”

“Fire!”

The arrows and spells from the allied mages and archers struck the ground.

Kabooooooom!

Craaaaaaaaack!

Booooooooooooooooom!

There were explosions everywhere, and the forsaken ones started moving faster.

The enemies weren’t wavering at all. The lifeless puppets that had already lost their will were blocking the spells and arrows with their bodies as they sluggishly walked toward the wall.

It caused a lot of damage, but I was sure Sun Hee-Young hadn’t just forced the troops to move forward without a plan.

This decision was made because…

‘They’re getting healed.’

I had never heard of the undead getting healed, but Sun Hee-Young was probably granted a skill that had that kind of ability. After all, she was one of the top priests on our continent.

‘I say top priests, but technically, the so-called top priests are only her and Elena.’

A Saintess-level healer could do just about anything. They could cast

protection-type spells that were as strong as what an archmage could cast, and they could cast buffs that could boost a third-rate adventurer's stats to a first-rate one.

If all the forsaken ones were moving under Sun Hee-Young's protection, then a one-man invasion on Saint Bell didn't seem all that impossible.

The bodies of the forsaken ones—battered and broken—regenerated constantly. They were suffering injuries so severe that they couldn't move, but the faint black barrier enveloping them was restoring them to full health.

Just then, undead creatures with shields moved forward while placing their shield in front of them, and ones with massive frames took the lead while ignoring the arrows and weak spells landing on them.

To make matters worse, they seemed to be following a basic formation.

Sun Hee-Young was one of the guild members familiar with military strategies, just like Jo Hye-Jin and me. Although she focused more on stats and administrative duties, she would oversee the actual duties when Jo Hye-Jin and I weren't around.

She started receiving less attention when the guild welcomed more members and grew even bigger, but I never doubted her abilities.

'She's actually difficult to deal with.'

Many obstacles prevented the enemy from approaching the wall, but Sun Hee-Young pushed the forsaken ones forward, and they were soon right in front of Saint Bell.

There was a deafening explosion, and the forsaken ones crashed into the wall. Regardless of their jobs, the allied forces fired arrows, oil, holy water, and more.

The weaker undead monsters collapsed and turned into a ladder that helped the forsaken ones climb up.

“*Roooooooooooooooar!*”

“Get away, you bastard!”

“Arrows! Bring me more arrows!”

“The wall in Zone Two has been destroyed. What the hell are the mages doing?!”

“Draw the bowstring! Don’t stop firing those arrows, you idiots!”

“Fire! Fire! What are you doing?! Hey, rookie! Do you want to die, damn it?!”

“Requesting reinforcements! Requesting reinforcements! Move! Move!”

To make things worse, the named beings were already climbing the walls.

‘Damn it.’

“Mr. William,” I said.

“Yes?”

I expected there to be named beings, but…

“Those guys are… different…” I mumbled.

“Push them back!”

“They’re too fast! Shit!”

It had been an hour since the defense war started. Considering the fact that I was already hearing screams everywhere, I was seriously wondering whether retreat was the right choice, but…

“Over here! You dirty bastards!”

There was always a way. The ones who were drawing attention with their

actions were the masked figures who had kidnapped me. It was my first time seeing them since then, but the fact that they were sacrificing themselves to protect the walls made me smile.

'That's what I'm talking about.'

"I leave the rest to you, Cassel…"

"*Ahhhhhh!*"

One of them charged at an enemy while covered in magic explosives. He showed his perseverance by holding onto the enemy's leg, even though he couldn't move his arms and legs properly.

"Rohen… Protect Rohen. You must…!"

"Damn it! Damn it! You undead bastards!"

I deliberately placed them in the danger zone, and they put on a great sacrifice show, which met my expectations. I was worried that they would die before doing anything, but unlike my expectations, those masked scums managed to put on a great performance.

'I suppose it's a relief.'

If William were like Kim Hyun-Sung, he would be able to cover all the walls, but he wasn't Kim Hyun-Sung.

He had gotten stronger after his awakening, but he wasn't fit for that kind of combat. He would inevitably need help from others. He was as precise and as meticulous as a machine, but…

'His Stamina and Agility are lacking.'

Even if I were to limit his route, the range William could cover was big. Out of all the guys I used, Rafael was the slowest one, but William was slower than Rafael. Of course, I'd say the decisive factor was the fact that William had no

wings, unlike Rafael.

I had been trying to overlook his slowness, but I just couldn't do it.

'I don't think he'll be useful in the long run.'

Of course, he had other strengths.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young," William said.

"Yes?" I answered.

"…"

"Let's go," he said.

"It's the Flower and Fertility Familia! Clear the path!"

"Clear the path! It's the Flower and Fertility Familia!"

I had to admit that the members of the familia were coordinated.

It was impossible for Kim Hyun-Sung to really fit into the Blue Guild.

Actually, it could be done if I were to force it, but that wasn't the best way to utilize Kim Hyun-Sung.

None of the guild members—no, none of the adventurers on the continent were capable of coordinating with him. Ironically, William's slowness played a big role in keeping the Flower and Fertility Familia together.

Their formation was still at the basic level, but after some adjustments, it changed completely. The group moved as one, as if trying to show everyone that they were a family rather than a party.

They knew each other's movement patterns. Everyone understood what they needed to do at certain times. Groups like them were easy to control, so if one of them were to take the lead…

'The rest of them would follow.'

The only thing William did was move, but I saw the members of the familia moving forward to support William as if they had all agreed to do so beforehand.

Their arrows, magic, spells, and movements were pretty basic, but the vanguards followed William and made a path using their shield. They were kind of slow, but I saw an attack powerful enough to actually do something.

Every time a crimson flower was drawn, a path would appear.

"Emilia!"

"Okay."

"Mr. William is moving, so move! Don't stop!"

Their planned actions unfolded before me. Unlike the Blue Guild, who were known for their distinct identities, this familia was different. I couldn't compare the two and say who was more superior, but if I *had* to choose one team…

'Our guild is a lot better.'

Even without Kim Hyun-Sung, the Blue Guild was still strong.

Of course, they couldn't be compared directly.

Excluding Ha-Yan and Kim Hyun-Sung, the Park-Ki-Ri siblings were a great team, but they tended to keep to their own circle.

Jo Hye-Jin would also become hard to control once she was on her unicorn, while Elena was hard to use because she relied heavily on the party's support.

Han Sora was always with Jung Ha-Yan, so it was like she wasn't even on the

battlefield.

As for Chang-Ryeol… I still couldn't deduce his thoughts.

Since each and every guild member was so unique, I couldn't imagine them getting along, but once I was involved, it would be impossible for them not to get along.

'That's why they need me.'

It became clear to me that only someone like me was capable of controlling the Blue Guild. They could function as a party, but I was the only one who could bring out a hundred percent of their capabilities.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young," William said.

"We'll be stepping outside the wall," I informed him.

"Pardon?"

"We're going to target the caster directly. That's the only way," I added.

"Are you saying we need to break through the undead?" he asked.

"I'll try to avoid it… but I don't think it's impossible as long as I'm with all of you," I said.

It was only for a moment, but the Flower and Fertility Familia showed me a breathtaking sight, and I could feel the air of the Blue Guild from them. The vast battlefield appeared before us.

The moment I walked out while wearing the wreath of light…

[Mainstream Event: Monarch of Sunset's Second Story—the Army of the Forsaken Saint has started.]

I heard a voice.

CHAPTER 1170
ARMY OF THE FORSAKEN SAINT (1)

The moment I walked out while wearing the wreath of light…

[Mainstream Event: Monarch of Sunset's Second Story—the Army of the Forsaken Saint has started.]

I heard a voice.

'Second story?'

I finally understood how this mainstream event was going to go. Based on the situation, the first story was probably the dethronement of the Commander of the 21st Legion.

Since it was an incident that happened at a place that had nothing to do with the players of Rohen, then it wasn't strange that this one was the second story.

The first expedition team that went against Jo Hye-Jin was forced to retire before they could even do anything.

The operation to reclaim Saint Bell was certainly worthy of becoming a key chapter in Rohen's history, but using a trash mob like Chalkis of Flesh and Gore as the second story of the mainstream event wasn't good enough.

Obviously, the system also didn't want to use a lower-ranking demon for the mainstream event.

In that sense, the system probably judged that the Army of the Forsaken Saint was fit to tie the grand stories together. It was like the first bridge that led to the mainstream event story—Monarch of Sunset.

‘Technically, it should be called the Army of the Forsaken One’s Saint.’

It was like she had gotten a new nickname upon receiving a new skill. Anyway, we had to cross this bridge properly. There could be another way around, but we had no idea what that was, so we had no choice but to go head-on.

Since this was a story recognized by the system, there were rewards. Since Rohen’s overall stats had to improve drastically, this was like a much-needed blessing from the heavens.

‘The harder it is, the bigger the reward.’

I thought the only thing we were going to get out of this was experience, as the monsters were all undead creatures, but it felt like a fitting reward was given at the right time.

‘It could also motivate them as well.’

No one here cared about rewards or increasing their stats like me. Right now, everyone was busy stopping the forsaken ones with their lives. For those driven by an unknown excitement, the key was that this fight was a mainstream event, and they were taking part in a battle worthy of a page in history.

“Stop them!”

“Stop them! Stop them in their tracks!”

“Come at me, you dead bastards!”

Thinking that the system was on the human’s side probably boosted their morale.

Although the system was completely neutral…

‘Humans tend to think that history and stories are centered around them.’

They obviously thought that the mainstream event, Monarch of Sunset, was their story.

The soldiers were clearly pumped up; the warriors spat and yelled with fury, while the archers aimed their bows at their targets. The battlefield seemed like it was intoxicated by the heat of the battle.

Of course, everyone was focused on a certain place.

“Let’s head out.”

They looked at the Flower and Fertility Familia with high expectations.

‘This kind of epic hero tale is always great.’

Their faces were saying that the familia was going to handle this, and it was the same look the Blue Guild had received countless times before.

Hyun-Sung always felt burdened whenever people looked at him that way, but that wasn’t the case for the Flower and Fertility Familia.

The members had pride in being the first familia to lead Rohen, and they also had faith in the Goddess of Flower and Fertility. They also trusted William, and the faces of the members as they looked at William was familiar to me.

After all, their expressions were the same as the members of the Blue Guild.

Based on my experience, people with that kind of mindset often performed miracles.

‘Miracle.’

I turned and saw the battlefield. It was filled with undead creatures, but there was a path for us to take.

The shortest route to reach Sun Hee-Young.

No one thought that we were trying to kill ourselves.

When William took a step forward, the members of the Flower and Fertility Familia took a step forward as well. The familia members squeezing through the narrow gap were filled with tension and excitement as they chopped off the heads of the forsaken ones.

“Don’t stop,” I ordered.

“Don’t stop!”

“Run!” I shouted.

“Keep running!”

“It’ll be dangerous if we get isolated. Move to the next coordinates,” I informed them.

“To the next location! Move to the next location!”

Blood splattered before me.

I heard the screams of the forsaken ones, but their attacks couldn’t reach me.

“Flower Wind!”

Emilia, who was a famous Spirit Swordsman, cast buffs on us that increased our movement speed. Even though I only took a step forward, it felt like I took two to three steps forward. I wasn’t physically fit, so by the time I was out of breath, I really wanted to collapse to the ground, but I was sure the vanguards were having a harder time.

They were performing extreme physical labor by blocking the giant wave of undead monsters. They pushed the monsters back with their shields, and William would chop off their heads. My feet kept stepping on the corpses of the undead. I almost lost my footing because of the unpleasant squishy feeling, but Emilia kept me steady.

“Are you okay, Mr. Lee Ki-Young?” Emilia asked.

“Yes, I’m fine. We should hurry…” I answered.

“Okay.”

Everyone looked out for each other. The mages pushed the enemies back while scattering flower petals, and the priests continued casting their spells, afraid that their buffs would expire.

“Move forward,” I instructed.

“What? But… at the front—”

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young, the front!” William shouted.

‘These guys still lack faith.’

“Move forward! Don’t stop; move forward!” I yelled.

“What?”

‘These bastards.’

“William! Move forward!” I shouted.

“Okay!” William answered.

A giant, undead creature raised its shield and confronted us.

However, a giant sun descended toward it from somewhere.

“Cast a protection spell,” I ordered.

The explosion was so loud that we could get caught by it.

However, a barrier engulfed us, allowing us to charge into the smoke and the fire.

“Don’t breathe in the smoke!” I told them.

It was so hot that it felt like I was on fire. The humid air clung to my skin as if I were in a sauna. The smoke and the flames had obscured our vision, but we still managed to find the right path.

“Forward! Forward!” I shouted.

“Move!”

“Move! Move!”

Those who got out of the smoke gasped for air as if they were whales surfacing above the sea.

“*Pwah!*”

“*Haaaaa!*”

“How many more… *haa… haa…* more times are we going to do this?”

‘Shit, I really can’t run anymore.’

I couldn’t remember the last time I ran this long without my wings.

“Are you okay, Mr. Lee Ki-Young?” William asked.

“*Haa… haa… haa… haa…* I-I’m okay,” I answered.

‘I’m not okay, damn it.’

The members of the Flower and Fertility Familia exchanged glances. They seemed to have judged that I couldn’t run any longer because Emilia grabbed and carried me.

“I… *haa… haa…* I can run as well,” I said.

‘Thanks. I was really at my limit.’

Overall, the rearguards looked pale; they had low stamina, after all. They probably weren't suffering as much as me, but because of their jobs, I was sure they had never run like this before.

The lack of oxygen just now made it worse.

'But the ride is really uncomfortable.'

'The members of my familia seem to be comfortable with carrying me, but this ride shakes too much.'

"A little more!" I shouted.

"A little more! Move it!"

"Don't stop moving! Keep going!"

"*Haa… haa… haa… haa…*"

"Next coordinate! To the next coordinate!"

"Forward! Move forward!"

"Magic support!"

"Hold your breath! Hold your breath!"

"*Haaaaap!*"

"*Pwaaaaah!*"

'We're slowing down because of the rearguards.'

We were running while recovering just a tiny bit of our stamina, but the accumulated fatigue couldn't be relieved. The mages were stumbling with exhaustion on their faces. I was worried about the possibility of them being unable to cast more spells.

‘I think it’s best if we leave them behind.’

We needed to deal with the stragglers so the team wouldn’t get isolated.

‘Just stay behind, guys.’

“*Haa… haa…* just leave me,” a member said.

‘Yeah, that’s what I’m talking about.’

“Leave this place to me… and go ahead!” they added.

‘Yeah, you can’t do anything without that kind of selflessness.’

“The Flower and Fertility Familia doesn’t leave their family members behind.”

However, these stubborn fools had just said that they wouldn’t leave their family members behind. It was like they’d rather die here than abandon their family.

Obviously, I had to step in.

“Yes, they’re right. The Flower and Fertility Familia never abandons its family members.”

I really hoped my heartfelt line would change their minds, but this guy seemed like he really wanted to live. He was shedding tears of complicated emotions, but he didn’t tell us to leave him behind again.

‘Why did you tell us to leave you in the first place? Stop making me have expectations.’

I thought perhaps it would be better to slow down, but we couldn’t do that. When I looked back, I noticed that the forsaken ones had started climbing the walls. The soldiers were fighting desperately, but they were falling apart.

The walls built by the mages were constructed at the last minute, and unlike the forsaken ones, humans would eventually get exhausted.

Eventually, they would lose the strength to pull their bowstring, and their sword swings would slow down. The mages would also complain about how they were out of mana.

'We can't slow down.'

We had to save those troops no matter what and take them with us.

It'd be meaningless if only the Flower and Fertility Familia survived this.

'Once this is over, they'll prepare for a bit and charge into the Demon King of Sunset's Castle.'

We couldn't sacrifice those meat shields for something like this.

At this point, the best choice was to push them into the Demon King's Castle and transform them into our meat shield once this event was done. I couldn't help but feel nervous. After all, if things went wrong, we'd lose it all.

"Clear the path!" I shouted.

"Okay!"

"We're almost there. We're almost there!" I yelled.

It was a white lie.

"*Haa… haa…*"

"*Ugh!*"

"Hold on longer! Don't stop!"

"We're almost there!" I told them.

Another white lie…

"*Yaaaaaaaaaah!*"

"We're really close! Keep moving!" I shouted.

However, the third time wasn't the charm, as I noticed them grumbling about how exhausted they were feeling. As expected, their formation started to collapse. Most of them were physically exhausted, and they had been trying to hold on by sheer willpower.

To make things worse, the vanguards looked really exhausted as well.

The situation at the walls was worse. Some parts of the wall were collapsing. Fortunately, the enemies' goal wasn't Saint Bell, and it wasn't our goal as well, which made the defense possible, but the players almost had no wall to stand on.

"Hold on! For Rohen! For Rohen!!!"

It was admirable how they shouted at the top of their lungs to lift everyone's spirits, but they were no different from a scared dog barking its lungs out.

"We must protect it! For Rohen!"

"Don't take a step back! Fight until the very end!"

"The 24th wall is coming down! Hurry up and move!"

'Damn it.'

"For Rohen! For Rohen!!!"

'This won't do. We need to abandon the stragglers even if the Flower and Fertility Familia doesn't abandon its family.'

Just as I had that thought, a forsaken one charged at a warrior busy catching

his breath. He couldn't really react because he was focused on the enemy on his left, and the party members who were supposed to back him up couldn't help him either.

Just then, a giant Blood Golem got up and crushed the heads of the forsaken ones.

"Reinforcements! They're here!"

It wasn't just one. Blood Golems rose and confronted the forsaken ones blocking our path. I didn't know who was providing support, but I had an idea about their identity, so there was no need for me to check.

"Arhendel… The reinforcements must be from Arhendel," I said.

And that was when I heard a loud voice from the wall…

"S-S-Sora!!" Jung Ha-Yan screamed.

CHAPTER 1171
ARMY OF THE FORSAKEN SAINT (2)

Han Sora was one of the underrated members in the Blue Guild. In addition to the fact that she was working on the business and administrative side of the guild, she was also a black mage.

Unfortunately, the fact that she was a black mage meant that she couldn't actively step up to lend a hand.

In fact, there were only a handful of times when her abilities were shown to the public. Even then, she was working as Jung Ha-Yan's backup, so it wasn't an exaggeration to say that her abilities as a black mage were never shown to the world.

The black mage had little to do with Light Ki-Young's branding. Even if the world knew that Han Sora was a black mage, it wasn't like she could use necromancy in front of everyone.

Basically, her skills and abilities that could ruin the Blue Guild's image were sealed, and she was recruited as Jung Ha-Yan's babysitter rather than a combatant, so there was no reason for her to go out to the front lines.

But since we were in this kind of situation…

'She's quickly proving to be quite reliable.'

While the battlefield's unique circumstances played a part, the sight of the Blood Golem rising up was truly a sight to behold.

The sight of the small army moving forward while trampling and pushing aside the forsaken ones was enough to make people cheer.

Of course, the golems' form wasn't all that great, but in a chaotic situation

like this, being the meat shields was more than enough.

— Roooooooooar!

Their numbers were growing. There were dozens, hundreds—no, thousands of them.

The sight was impossible with Han Sora's current level of skill, so I instantly understood what was happening. It wasn't Han Sora backing up Jung Ha-Yan this time. It was the other way around.

'Damn it.'

Even if that was the case…

'She had grown pretty strong in such a short period of time.'

I thought she wouldn't work as a black mage in Rohen, but she had to have thought that it would be advantageous for her goal if she walked on the same path here. Perhaps the promise we made was the reason she changed her mind.

'But the promise she made with me might've been nothing, Sora. If I'm the fake Ki-Young… none of that will matter.'

I promised her that I would help her spread her wings when we returned to the continent, but if I were fake, then it was a promise that was bound to be broken.

The contract I had made with Jupiter's side could be fraudulent, so if I weren't the real Ki-Young, my promise with her would end up falling apart.

If he had a shred of conscience, he would probably be considerate, but unfortunately, the real Lee Ki-Young was a scum who would go back on his words whenever he wanted to do so.

'But if I'm actually the real one, then… I'll make sure to keep my promise.'

Han Sora's influence on the battlefield was so great that I couldn't help but think that way. Of course, the fact that players from Arhendel had come to support us was a huge help, but the sight of the golems having a small war with the forsaken ones was impressive enough to boost the morale of the troops.

"Arhendel! They're from Arhendel!"

"Open the path!"

"It's a golem!"

The Blood Golems that looked like giant slimes manifested all over the battlefield.

I could see them taking form while absorbing Jung Ha-Yan's mana. A weapon appeared in their hands at some point, and they started swinging it.

Slam!

The forsaken ones were sent flying.

'Not bad.'

It was also impressive to see them maintaining formation.

'This is a full-on battle of monsters.'

The forsaken ones controlled by Sun Hee-Young and the golems controlled by Han Sora were fighting each other, creating a sight straight out of an end-of-the-world legend. Both were the studious type, so they were following the Blue Guild's tactical handbook.

The difference was that one side used strength while the other had the advantage in numbers.

Compared to Han Sora, who had invested a lot in each of her summons, Sun

Hee-Young's investment was low. Since she was fighting the war with numbers, sacrificing dozens just to take down one golem was enough.

The Blood Golems' attacks were losing momentum.

It wasn't much, but they were sticking closer together.

Perhaps it was just me, but they reminded me of Park Deok-Gu and Yoo Ah-Young. They stood in a line and pushed the forsaken ones back to create space for the rearguards. The golems' attacks struck dozens of the forsaken ones and blasted them away, but the forsaken ones stood up once more before relentlessly charging at the golems, forcing them to go down one by one.

Boooooooooom!

"*Screeeeeech!*"

Crack!

"What are these Blood Golems…"

"Reinforcements from Arhendel have arrived."

"It's like they're opening a path for us…"

"*Ha… haha…* what… in the world…"

"I can't… believe what I'm seeing."

They were obviously talking about the Flower and Fertility Familia who had destroyed the balance of power. When the Blood Golems opened up a path as if telling us to move forward, we started moving again because it'd be strange not to do that.

Of course, the situation at the walls had changed as well. They had to have realized that it was meaningless to keep climbing the walls because the

troops had rushed out of the walls.

The players from Arhendel didn't seem that powerful, but the number of reinforcements was enough to hold up the shields for the exhausted troops.

'I feel like Sora picked this time on purpose.'

"For Rohen!"

"For Rohen!"

"Fight!"

"Charge! Chaaarge!"

'The atmosphere changed.'

I was sure Sun Hee-Young knew that better than anyone.

The longer the battle dragged on, the more the battle would tilt in her enemy's favor, but a competent commander wouldn't react sensitively to such changes.

The forsaken ones continued falling, and the troops, whose spirits were lifted, aggressively pushed the enemies back as if this were their only chance to do so.

I heard explosions and screams along with loud cheers.

"Move it!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Move it! A little more!"

"A little more!"

I extended my hand out while wearing the wreath of light, and brilliant

swirls of light danced around like flower petals. Instinctively, I knew very well this was the time to unleash the light.

A single beam of light pervaded the dark battlefield, and for the allied soldiers looking forward, it probably looked like a guiding beacon. I was sure they thought the light was telling them that they could win and that the light would eventually win.

“O light!”

“For the Goddess of Flower and Fertility!”

The mentally and physically exhausted troops saw a lone light illuminating the path ahead of them. Some of the drama queens were probably crying right now.

[You pests! You’re nothing but insignificant pests, so how dare you!]

‘Hee-Young, y-you’re acting too much like a villain.’

[Yes, struggle all you want. I’ll crush that hope of yours!]

‘Y-You’re too immersed in your role.’

I immediately realized that I was up high enough to see Sun Hee-Young’s face.

‘Why is she so… ‘

She was frowning; she was clearly upset, and she was feeling hesitant as well.

I was looking at her, and she was doing the same.

Despite the fact that she was clearly showing hostility toward the Flower and Fertility Familia, she seemed frustrated, and it was probably because the current situation felt somewhat familiar to her.

Fighting for Rohen alongside his comrades and sacrificing himself for justice and the light while being covered in blood and sweat were the hallmarks of Light Ki-Young.

She was looking for Light Ki-Young in Flower Ki-Young.

'Keep looking.'

I put more dirt on my face, and tears rolled down my face. I panted hard as if I were out of breath, and I screamed while unleashing a radiant light.

"Hang in there everyone!"

"Okay!"

"A little more! Hang in there just a little more!"

'You remember the time we worked together, right?'

I was sure there was a time when the Blue Guild fought against evil and darkness. Obviously, Lee Ki-Young from back then wasn't all that different from the current version, as I would always prioritize others before myself.

Moreover, I would always fight on the side of light.

"Miss Emilia, are you okay?" I asked.

"O light…"

I wasn't afraid of getting hurt.

"*Ugh…* I'm okay," Emilia answered.

I never gave up hope.

"*Yaaaaaaaaah!*"

Even though Kim Hyun-Sung had made it clear that I wasn't the real one, I

was still persistent and brave. I was living while carrying the light in my heart.

[What… the hell… are you?]

"*Haa… haa…*"

[What the hell are you?!]

'What do you mean? I'm Lee Ki-Young.'

I was the Lee Ki-Young who had lost his memories.

[Don't imitate him. You…]

'I'm not imitating him. This is my true nature.'

She was becoming mentally unstable, and her control over the forsaken one was weakening. The closer the Flower and Fertility got to her, the more transfixed she became on me.

As expected, the system hadn't granted Sun Hee-Young any close combat skills, but the forsaken ones crawled out once more from the swamp of pitch-black, holy power.

They were a lot stronger and more formidable than the previous ones, but the summoner's focus was elsewhere, causing them to be less efficient.

The named beings were getting attacked by the Blood Golems and the Flower and Fertility Familia.

Sun Hee-Young looked at me with an astonished look, and it was obvious what she was thinking. I was sure she wanted to know why Han Sora and Jung Ha-Ya were helping me. She wasn't sure, but she probably figured out that the Blood Golems and the tiny, radiant sun weren't from Rohen.

There was also the fact that they were fighting according to the tactical

handbook.

'Kim Hyun-Sung can probably recognize the strange details.'

But that wasn't the case for Sun Hee-Young…

It was basically gambling, but at least I could instill some doubt.

The doubt that the person in front of her was the real Lee Ki-Young…

I was sure that doubt would lead to another doubt. If I were the real Lee Ki-Young, then Kim Hyun-Sung, whom they had dragged to this place, would probably be the fake one.

It didn't take long for her head to become filled with complicated thoughts.

[Do you… recognize me?]

'Anyway, Kim Hyun-Sung is fake. Forget logic. He's the fake one. I don't know if I'm the real one or not, but whether I'm real or fake, I'm better than Hyun-Sung when it comes to politics. Anyway, he's the fake one.'

"…"

"You're…"

The moment I clapped my eyes on Sun Hee-Young, I cried without realizing it.

It was the perfect moment to squeeze out some tears, and of course, I couldn't miss out on saying a memorable line.

"*Ah*… why… am I… crying…"

Perhaps it was because of the faint memories I had of her, but I couldn't stop crying. Nothing could prove it better than these heartfelt tears. Based on my lore, the soul of the twenty-three-year-old Flower Ki-Young had just

remembered the woman named Sun Hee-Young.

[Do you know… who I am?]

Anyway, Kim Hyun-Sung was the fake one.

CHAPTER 1172
ARMY OF THE FORSAKEN SAINT (3)

In this type of politics, the guy with the loudest voice usually won, but in addition to a loud voice, there was another essential factor one needed to become a successful political leader. Actually, those words couldn't do it justice.

Without that factor, one would most likely fail to overpower others with one's loud voice alone.

'It's a matter of how hard I try to act rational.'

Whether I was actually rational didn't really matter.

What mattered was making a claim that appealed to the public while acting as rational as possible. Speaking emotionally rather than rationally would work on the public at first, but in the end, it was not an effective strategy.

If Kim Hyun-Sung were to get countered by something like this…

'He'd just be getting a taste of his own medicine.'

It was all because there was a very high chance that he would pay the price for what he had done. If one were to ask me whether Kim Hyun-Sung was rational or not, I would say no because the method and path he had taken to get here weren't rational at all.

I would give him credit for being driven, but in this case, it was better to describe it as lunacy rather than drive.

I couldn't even begin to describe how shocked and surprised the members of the Blue Guild had to have felt when he told them his plan to come to Rohen with the Demon Monarch visa.

To make things worse, he succeeded and claimed that I wasn't the real Lee Ki-Young.

I was obviously Lee Ki-Young, but he was saying that our souls had been switched or something.

Obviously, it was a bunch of nonsense, but there was a reason the guild members believed in that nonsense—they knew Kim Hyun-Sung and I were connected through the Regressor Instruction Manual.

If the process of explaining all of that were rational, then it'd be a lot easier for the guild members to accept it, but there was no way Kim Hyun-Sung would be rational during all this.

It was about time for those symptoms of madness to show.

It was his fault for getting drunk and causing a scene right before I left.

'I need to go to Rohen right now… blah, blah… damn it… shit blah blah… '

He probably wasn't capable of speaking properly.

I was sure he couldn't have been able to convey his thoughts properly, as he had to have been extremely worked out at the time. Even if he had somehow managed to explain things, it probably hadn't made any sense.

I could imagine him screaming in rage, so it was understandable why Sun Hee-Young would react that way.

It was kind of strange to say Kim Hyun-Sung was acting like his usual self, but the Lee Ki-Young before her was the same one she knew.

I was the same innocent, persistent, holy, and sacred saint. The same one who had fought for the continent and the light; the same one who had sacrificed myself for justice and my beliefs.

[Do you know… who I am?]

This was obviously the next step.

“What do you…”

The awkward standoff continued, and her random question caused the Flower and Fertility Familia to look at her while being at a loss for words.

I was sure they found it strange that the Saint of Flower and Fertility was suddenly crying.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young, please stand behind me.”

Obviously, Will showed that he wanted to protect me.

‘It’s like we’re in the same place but divided in mind.’

Sun Hee-Young probably thought that she was talking to *something* inside me. Although we had different thoughts, the situation made sense.

“Who… are you?” I asked.

[Do you not remember me?]

“Why are all of you…” I paused.

[…]

“Why did you come to Rohen?” I asked.

[We came to find… you.]

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young, you don’t need to listen to her anymore. She’s—”

“No, Mr. William. Something… Something about her is different,” I interrupted William.

“Pardon?” William asked.

Why was I crying?

No matter how much I thought about it, I couldn't find the reason behind it, but one thing I was sure of was that my subconscious remembered her. With that, she no longer seemed like the enemy.

The Forsaken Saint also stopped being hostile toward me, but I was sure the Flower and Fertility Familia felt like they were walking on thin ice, and it made sense—they were the weaker side in this standoff, after all.

I was the only reason an all-out war hadn't started.

[It's me, Mr. Lee Ki-Young.]

I was getting a headache.

Despite thinking that I could remember her, my mind was foggy, and I couldn't remember her name and face.

"Are you okay, Mr. Lee Ki-Young?" William asked.

"Damn it. Prepare for battle!"

"Stop…" I mumbled.

"Excuse me?" William asked.

[…]

"She's not the enemy. I don't know why… but I get the feeling that she's not the enemy. I know my words sound strange… and I can't understand it either, but the Forsaken Saint isn't our enemy," I told him.

When I showed them how confused I was, the two sides showed slightly different reactions. For Sun Hee-Young, it was like her doubts were slowly turning into certainty. I was sure she was still confused about why I couldn't remember her, but it seemed like the weight was shifting toward the thought

that I was the real one.

Obviously, it was different for William and the others.

They had survived many life-threatening situations just to get close to the enemy and face her, but the Saint of Flower and Fertility was suddenly saying that the demon before them wasn't the enemy.

It was only natural for William and the others to feel confused. I was sure he wouldn't try to find the reason. The Saint of Rohen had said that the Forsaken Saint was probably not the enemy, and that was more than enough.

After adjusting his sword, William continued the conversation.

"Are you our enemy?"

[…]

"I'll ask again. Are you our enemy?" William repeated.

Sun Hee-Young didn't answer. She probably decided to ignore him, so I decided to chime in.

"Please answer, Forsaken Saint. Are you our enemy?"

[I… I'm not your enemy. I'm actually…]

"Then why…" I asked.

[I can't tell you anything right now, but… as of right now, I don't think I can take you back, Mr. Lee Ki-Young.]

Even Sun Hee-Young seemed like she couldn't make a sound decision.

If she could, she would take me away right now, but if the Monarch of Sunset was fake…

If this version of Kim Hyun-Sung weren't the same one she knew, then…

taking me to the Monarch of Sunset's Castle would basically be the same thing as killing me.

The fake Hyun-Sung had some kind of goal.

Although all of this was nothing but an assumption, she couldn't take the risk of putting me in danger. At least until everything was clear… leaving me with the Flower and Fertility Familia was probably the better choice.

That was how her line of thought ought to go…

I was sure Sun Hee-Young's mind was on the verge of exploding. From convincing the guild members who had crossed over with her to finding a way to confirm the Monarch of Sunset's true identity, I was sure she was thinking about many things.

[I'll make sure to come to receive you, Mr. Lee Ki-Young.]

"…"

[No matter what.]

"Mr. William, are you really going to let it end like this? Right now, the enemy—"

"The Forsaken Saint might not be the enemy. Since Mr. Lee Ki-Young said that, then I'm sure she's not the enemy. Of course… it's not something we can announce to everyone, but…" William paused.

"But… this might be our only chance, Mr. William," Emilia argued.

"In this mainstream event, things we can't understand can happen, Emilia," William said.

"…"

"Humanity's power is nothing compared to the Monarch of Sunset. It was

almost a miracle that we made it this far in this battle. Humans could've faced total annihilation here, facing catastrophic damage. To be honest…" William paused.

"Yes?"

"There's no guarantee that we'll be lucky next time," William continued.

"…"

"I'm certain there's a way to approach this mainstream event from an alternative angle and… this might be the answer," William said.

'This guy is just saying all the right things.'

Of course, he looked worried. He seemed like he had already chosen to believe me, but he couldn't maintain composure when he saw me walking toward the Forsaken Saint. I saw Sun Hee-Young gradually sinking into the black swamp.

'Looks like she found a new way to move around.'

The time to cast it was extremely long, but it gave us more time to make an emotional connection. I couldn't stop crying, and strangely enough, I unknowingly reached out toward her while crying.

The Flower and Fertility Familia was surprised, but when they realized that Sun Hee-Young wasn't going to harm me, they watched me silently.

Sun Hee-Young also grabbed my hand with her trembling hand. She was crying as well, and to make things worse, she seemed kind of anxious.

'Why is it that those who go down the dark path always think they're ugly?'

Doom Hyun-Sung was cool… and Doom Hee-Young is really cool as well. Her hair flowing like a waterfall with a color as deep and alluring as the black swamp was so beautiful that I couldn't quite describe it.

Her eyes were the same.

I had no idea who had designed her, but Doom Hee-Young's form deserved more than a perfect score of a hundred points.

"*Um…*"

[…]

"You…"

[Right now, that's more than enough.]

When Sun Hee-Young disappeared into the black swamp, the forsaken ones crumbled and fell apart. At the same time, I heard cheers all over the place.

"*Let's goooo!*"

"*Wooooooooooooo!*"

"We're alive… We're alive, damn it!"

"*Heuk…* we won."

It was a cheer that bordered madness. Everyone knew they had won.

[Mainstream Event Monarch of Sunset's Second Story. The Army of the Forsaken Saint has been completed.]

'I'm glad.'

I was afraid that we wouldn't get a clear result, as this was an indirect approach, but I was sure the result made the Flower and Fertility Familia feel a bit comfortable about what had happened.

The soldiers collapsed right on the spot as if they were puppets that had lost their strings, especially the mages who had told us to leave them. They sprawled out on the ground, panting heavily. They were clearly at their

limits, both physically and mentally.

They could cheer like the ordinary soldiers, but they all looked worried. Perhaps they realized that something more complex than they thought was hidden. They were probably thinking that…

'This is only the beginning.'

I was sure it was the same for Kim Hyun-Sung.

'This is really… '

It all depended on how much Sun Hee-Young would get involved in the politics there, and honestly, I trusted her.

Moreover, all Kim Hyun-Sung had done at the time was watch through a screen, right? With him shut away in his room like a recluse, crying and laughing while staring at a small screen, it'd be impossible for anyone to think that he was still sane.

'Even if I fail to pin him as the fake Hyun-Sung… '

I could probably make them think that he was so delusional that he was imagining things.

"He'll probably get confused as well," I said.

CHAPTER 1173
A SECRET VISITOR (1)

Victory was always sweet.

[[Mainstream Event Monarch of Sunset's Second Story. The Army of the Forsaken Saint has been completed. In honor of the surviving players, a buff will be granted to all players on the Rohen Continent until the end of this mainstream event.]

[Blessing for the Forsaken Ones]

[MP Consumption decreased by 20%. Recovery Rate increased by 30%.]

[Mainstream Event "The Army of the Forsaken Saint" Raid Rankings]

[1. Lee Ki-Young - 4,524,511 points]

[2. William - 2,231,561 points]

[3. Jung Ha-Yan - 2,231,561 points]

[…]

[…]

[7. Han Sora -…]

[We'll be giving coins and items to the top-tier players who worked hard during the Army of the Forsaken Saint raid.]

'That's crazy.'

The bigger the reward, the sweeter it would be.

'It's seriously crazy.'

Obviously, I expected our overall stats to increase once we cleared this story, but I had never imagined that the system would bestow upon all of us a buff.

I wondered if things like this happened in Rohen often, so I looked around, but most of the players had a similar reaction to me. They were either shocked or surprised, so the players of Rohen also thought that this was an unusual reward.

'It's giving us this much?'

Of course I had an idea as to why we had received this kind of reward. It probably thought the mainstream event was unbalanced. The system, which prioritized balance, had to have decided to offer the humans the least bit of mercy.

Since the system got involved unofficially, it could be a sign telling us that Rohen's forces weren't enough, but thanks to its involvement, we got a buff that decreased our MP consumption and increased our recovery rate.

The buff was valuable and worth the effort.

Of course, the sweet mist of hope descended upon humanity once again. I saw the soldiers jumping around as if they were in the middle of a festival.

William and Emilia seemed like they just wanted to enjoy the victory right now rather than ask about that incident. To be exact, they created an atmosphere that helped the soldiers celebrate.

I saw them needlessly raising their flags and praising me.

'Yeah, yeah. I am the Rank One player, after all.'

But that wasn't all…

'Let's be honest here. I did everything from start to finish, and I even created

William.'

To boost their morale, I had to create a hero and turn them into an icon. To be honest, there was no one better than me for that role.

"It's mankind and Rohen's victory," William said.

"…"

"Both the light and the Saint of Flower and Fertility have won!" William shouted.

"*Wahhhhhhhhhh!*"

Naturally, the excited crowd gathered around and started praising the Flower and Fertility Familia's bravery and deeds. Right now, I needed to be kind of emotional, but the excited crowd approached me and tossed me up in the air.

'Why are they holding a festival? Is the fight over or something?'

"For the Saint of Flower and Fertility!"

'Did we win it all?'

"For the Saint of Flower and Fertility! *Hahahaha!* For the Saint of Flower and Fertility!!!"

It looked like a scene straight out of a Hollywood movie, and there were even two lovers sharing a kiss upon overcoming this mainstream story. I looked everywhere, and it felt like an ending song was being played from somewhere.

I wouldn't find it strange if the credits started rolling along with the music, so I thought about calming down, but the ordinary soldiers and the leaders of familias in the command center reacted similarly as everyone, leaving me with no choice but to shake my head.

"…"

'It's their first time… '

They had never finished a fight this big and intense. The battle was indeed intense, but they were already acting like sports players who had just emerged victorious from the most epic match of all time, even though this was only the second story.

'This is why the system gave us a buff as a reward. Look at how you guys are acting.'

The excitement and adrenaline from the battle still remained. Honestly, I wasn't too keen on it, but…

"I think it's best if we hold a small celebration for today's victory," I suggested.

I thought it would be best to let them ease up a bit.

"Would you like to do that?" William asked.

"Yes. They'll probably try to avoid a full-scale war for the time being. The 21st Legion is still in the middle of their northern campaign… and they used a lot of resources for this battle," I answered.

"Okay."

"I think it's best to give the soldier time to rest… and distribute as many supplies as possible. If there's alcohol, that's fine too… I hope we can honor the fallen and celebrate the soldiers' victory," I told him.

"I'll do as you ask, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," he said.

'Just mentioning alcohol seemed to have settled the atmosphere.'

As soon as it was announced that there would be a celebration to celebrate

our victory after the post-battle cleanup, the soldiers moved in perfect harmony.

Saint Bell, which had become a mess due to the war, was tidied up in no time, and some even gathered in small groups.

The heat of the battle and the joy of victory were still on their faces, but at least they had become a bit calmer than before.

Of course, this group was no exception as well.

"Sora! *Kgh… hiccup…"* Jung Ha-Yan cried.

"*Ah…* M-Miss Jung Ha-Yan…" Han Sora cried.

I noticed Jung Ha-Yan and Han Sora letting go of their built-up emotions. Overall, people seemed to welcome the reinforcements from Arhendel, but among them, Jung Ha-Yan and Han Sora stood out the most.

Like a cicada clinging to a tree, Jung Ha-Yan was stuck on Han Sora.

"Have you been… doing well?" Han Sora asked.

"Y-Yeah. W-What about you, S-S-Sora?" Jung Ha-Yan asked.

"I've been doing well, too. Why do you look so pale, Miss Jung Ha-Yan? Have you been eating properly?" she asked.

Of course, like a true Korean, Han Sora was worried about whether Jung Ha-Yan had been eating properly or not. Ha-Yan had been eating well. Actually, I had been feeding her well.

"You've been skipping meals again, haven't you? *Ah*… I knew it… You really went through a lot by yourself, didn't you?" Han Sora questioned.

"I-I wasn't alone. I-I met nice people… They're somewhere else right now. Sora, there's a person named Nam Goong-Seon there…" Jung Ha-Yan

mentioned.

“I see,” Han Sora said.

“Before that, I’ve been… making my magic stronger… s-so I couldn’t go to you even if I wanted to…” Jung Ha-Yan stuttered.

“I understand.”

They started catching up, and even back on the continent, Jung Ha-Yan was always the one who talked while Han Sora listened to her. It looks like things hadn’t changed at all.

I noticed Jung Ha-Yan glancing over a certain area. She was looking at the people who came with Han Sora. They were keeping their distance while gauging Han Sora’s mood.

“But… w-who are those people who came with you?” Jung Ha-Yan asked.

“They’re… the party members I work with. I-I got permission from Mr. Lee Ki-Young… and decided to start working in Arhendel,” Han Sora answered.

‘Why is she using me?’

“Oppa did?” Jung Ha-Yan asked.

“Yes. *Ah!* H-He probably forgot everything right now. Yeah… r-right,” Han Sora stuttered.

“Party member?” Jung Ha-Yan asked.

“Yes… we’re… in the same party,” Han Sora answered cautiously.

“*Ahh…* I-I see…” Jung Ha-Yan said.

“Can I introduce you to them?” Han Sora asked.

“Yeah,” Jung Ha-Yan answered.

Thankfully, the guy who spouted nonsense to me last time wasn't here. I wouldn't exactly call them replacements, but I noticed veterans among the group. Some members were efficient and reliable.

They could be put to good use, just like Grandpa Bolt.

'She made a pretty good party. Maybe she's trying to sacrifice an old warrior as well.'

It seemed like it was only yesterday when I was a bit worried about her due to her bold claim that she could grow stronger in Arhendel, but I had never imagined that she'd prove herself like this so soon.

Moreover, she earned quite a bit of trust from others. She hadn't just gathered party members, but she had also established herself as the party's leader.

'I always knew she was talented.'

Han Sora had been waiting for an opportunity to spread her wings, but unfortunately, I wasn't sure whether she would have the opportunity to do that upon our return to the continent.

Meanwhile, I saw even more awkward scenes.

"I've heard a lot about you, Miss Jung Ha-Yan."

"*Ah*, I-I see…" Jung Ha-Yan said.

'It's really awkward.'

Han Sora glanced at me, and she was clearly asking me to hurry up and ease this awkwardness.

"Hello," I greeted.

"*Ah!* Hello, Mr. Lee Ki-Young."

“O-Oppa!” Jung Ha-Yan greeted me.

As expected, Jung Ha-Yan stuck to my side again.

“I’m sorry that I took so long to introduce myself. I’d like to thank you officially. Thank you very much for coming here for Saint Bell, no—for Rohen,” I said.

“It’s nothing. We should actually be the ones to thank you. All of you were summoned to Rohen recently… but you stepped up for Rohen. Your actions made me feel so insignificant, and I also feel embarrassed, as I was the first to be here. You probably won’t understand, but…

“If it weren’t for Miss Han Sora… I’m sure we’d be wasting our time.”

“But you still came here,” I pointed out.

“*Haha…*”

“Do you mind if I sit down?” I asked.

“It would be an honor, Mr. Lee Ki-Young.”

To hear a veteran, who had been in Rohen for a long time, address me with such respect was the reason why people had to succeed in life.

“I haven’t had the chance to thank you, Miss Sora. Thank you,” I said.

“Sure… sub—I mean… Mr. Lee Ki-Young,” Han Sora corrected herself.

“O-Oppa, about what I mentioned before,” Jung Ha-Yan chimed in.

“Yes, Miss Ha-Yan?”

After that, there was a small moment of useless chatter, and as always, we talked about various topics. Of course, we eventually talked about more appropriate matters, especially about the battlefield.

No matter where I was, people were bound to gather.

William and Emilia joined the group at some point, and the leaders of other familias, who wanted a taste of sweet power, joined in as well, but I honestly didn't really care about the others.

Anyway, after spending some time with Jung Ha-Yan and Han Sora, I couldn't help but think about our continent. If I were the real Lee Ki-Young…

'What exactly made me come here? Wealth and power? I would be happy to give it all up and spend time with my family on the continent.'

I was suddenly reminded of how precious everyday life was…

"Cheers!"

"For the Saint of Flower and Fertility!"

It was late at night, but there were still campfires everywhere, and I could still hear people talking to each other.

"Can I ask about your next plan?"

The answer to Will's question was pretty obvious.

"I think we need to make preparations."

"Pardon?" William asked.

"Because we're going to be heading to the Demon King's Castle next," I added.

"…"

"We shouldn't wait for the enemy; I think we need to take the initiative and attack the Ashen Sunset Region," I suggested.

I sounded calm when I said that, but it felt like the atmosphere became

heavy due to my words.

'It might seem a little difficult.'

But we still need to go…

Externally, we were at war with another monarch, and internally, I was suspicious about the fake Hyun-Sung. Moreover, the madness surrounding it was intensifying, so heading to the Monarch's Castle at this time was the right choice.

"I can't say with certainty, but…" I paused.

"Yes?"

"The enemies are probably puzzled as well," I added.

I was sure they were having a 100-minute debate[1] about whether Kim Hyun-Sung was insane or not.

As expected, a visitor arrived stealthily on that same night.

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1. Based on a late-night debate program in Korea "MBC 100 Minutes Discussion" ☜

CHAPTER 1174
A SECRET VISITOR (2)

'It does seem a little too soon… '

However, I expected to receive feedback right away.

I would probably be busy with many things, but I had to do something right way.

The fake Hyun-Sung theory and the mad Hyun-Sung both sounded dangerous.

If I had to give an example, it would be like losing the captain in the middle of the sea.

Naturally, I had no idea who to trust, how to act, or which path I ought to take.

However, the Blue Guild had always been like that.

Whenever Kim Hyun-Sung or I weren't around, Jo Hye-Jin would take charge, and whenever she wasn't around, Sun Hee-Young would take charge, but both leaders had such a huge influence, so there were times when they couldn't manage things properly.

Asking what Kim Hyun-Sung or I would do was an ongoing problem for Jo Hye-Jin, Sun Hee-Young, and all the guild members in this kind of situation.

'Lee Ki-Young lost his memories.'

Kim Hyun-Sung could be fake, or Lee Ki-Young could be fake… I was sure they had no idea what was going on.

Fortunately, Sun Hee-Young had enough influence and a voice in the matter, so Kim Hyun-Sung would surely accept her words, but it wouldn't be enough to decide the guild members' next course of action.

'I figured they'd follow around like baby birds without their mommy.'

Obviously, what mattered most was whether her words were convincing or not. Even if Sun Hee-Young's influence in the guild was strong, there would be some hesitation about blindly trusting her.

"Who… are you?" I asked.

I was sure that was the reason why Kim Ye-Ri was standing before me.

'If it's not going to be Chang-Ryeol, then it will be Park Lian. If it's not them, then it will definitely be her.'

Only those three were capable of moving stealthily enough to slip in unnoticed…

I figured Ye-Ri was probably busy with the northern expedition, so I honestly thought Chang-Ryeol would come here.

Despite being busy, Kim Ye-Ri came all the way here to reveal the truth.

She was sizing me up. I thought her appearance had changed drastically like Sun Hee-Young, but I couldn't really see anything different about her. She probably thought I would be surprised and brought a solution.

It seemed like she had some tricks up her sleeve, like hiding herself or switching her demon form on and off, but Ye-Ri, the kid whom I hadn't seen in a while, looked no different from the way she did before leaving for Rohen.

Perhaps it was just me, but Kim Ye-Ri's gaze seemed to pierce right through me.

'She's pretty quick-witted… '

“W-Who are you? You’re…” I paused.

“…”

“I’m going to call someone. If you don’t leave now…” I threatened.

‘No, this isn’t right. This isn’t how the story should go.’

Just then, Kim Ye-Ri’s face was revealed beneath the moonlight.

Despite being an adult, she still looked like a child, so I lowered my guard.

“A child?” I questioned.

My comment was enough to make Kim Ye-Ri mad, but unfortunately, she wasn’t in the position to get mad right now.

“…”

“How did you get in here?” I asked.

‘Why isn’t she saying anything?’

“Did you take a wrong turn?” I asked.

“…”

“Can I ask which familia you’re from? Arhendel? No… I’ve never seen you before…” I said.

“…”

“A survivor of Saint Bell?” I questioned.

Of course, there couldn’t be any civilians in Saint Bell, as the factory was already running, but somehow, it seemed like a plausible setup.

Since I already treated her like a kid, I had to keep treating her that way for

now. The idea that Kim Ye-Ri had been hiding in a basement before the Ashen Sunset struck Saint Bell and only came out upon hearing people outside was a good story for her.

'Right? You think this is good too, right?'

"…"

"…"

"Are you okay?" I asked.

She nodded slightly, and I cautiously grabbed her hand.

"Have you been hiding all this time? The adults… t-the other people… are they…" I trailed off. The right thing to do was show that I wanted to comfort her and it wasn't because her nickname was the Daughter of Blue.

She had a habit of seeing the adults in the Blue Guild as parental figures. Of course, she didn't show it and acted touchy like a teenage daughter going through puberty, but I knew her true feelings better than anyone.

'I took care of her pretty well.'

She was quick to overreact to whatever I did, and like a teen dealing with some family drama, she secretly craved love. If she acted like this while she was sane, she would be horrified by her own behavior and smile awkwardly from a distance, but…

'Why do you look like you're about to cry? You're making me feel bad… '

Kim Ye-Ri couldn't snap at me since I had lost my memories. Perhaps she remembered the time she came to the Blue Guild's house from the slums, but she suddenly got emotional.

Kim Ye-Ri never really cried in front of people, but she lowered her head and cried.

In my eyes, this was a signal from her asking me to comfort her.

At some point, Kim Ye-Ri became a girl who had lost her parents and friends because of the Ashen Sunset, and I ended up being in a position to comfort her.

'I should give her a hug.'

"It's fine," I said.

"*Ugh…"*

"Everything will be fine," I said, comforting her.

"*Heuk…"* Ye-Ri cried.

"There's no one here who will hurt you, so don't worry," I told her.

"*Heuk… heuk…"* Kim Ye-Ri sobbed.

"You must've been through a lot. I don't know if my words will comfort you, but you don't have to worry now," I said, smiling warmly at her.

"*Ah!* Are you hungry? Or can you tell me what you need? If I can help you—"

"I'm okay," Kim Ye-Ri interrupted me.

"It's fine… no need to feel shy," I told her.

"…"

"…"

Normally, she'd throw a fit whenever I reached out to pat her head, but now, she was oddly quiet. I knew this was Kim Ye-Ri's true nature. She was like a cat with hidden claws, but seeing it with my own eyes made me feel even more surprised.

I thought I was hugging her for too long, so I tried to push her away gently, but she held me even tighter, making it difficult to pull away. She was still crying, so I acted confused.

Considering her upbringing, however, it was natural for her to react this way.

It was hard to imagine how heartbreaking all this had to be for her… the person she trusted and followed like her own parents had lost his memories and had even forgotten about her.

Luckily, I heard her mumble, "You can't be fake…"

'Yeah, that's what I'm talking about.'

'This warmth is real. A fake can't imitate this, right?'

"You just can't be fake…" Kim Ye-Ri repeated.

"*Huh?* Did you say something?" I asked.

"…"

She pushed me away slightly. After wiping her tears with one hand, she looked at me as if nothing had happened.

I was actually the one feeling anxious at the sight.

Meanwhile, Kim Ye-Ri looked embarrassed by her actions, and she awkwardly tugged her hair before wiping away her tears with one hand.

She had finally returned to her old self.

Just then, she opened her palm, revealing a tiny bead to me.

'What's this?'

'Why does she have this?'

'Isn't this a Memory Bead fragment?'

Story-wise, this was exactly when a bead fragment was supposed to show up.

It also looked like a Memory Bead fragment, but…

'You should've told me what it looked like, noona.'

It was giving off a subtle, mystical aura while emitting a pulsating light.

The closer I got to it, the faster the pulsating light became.

I had never seen this before, so I was surprised when Kim Ye-Ri suddenly showed it to me. With so many of these fragments scattered everywhere, I was not surprised that Kim Ye-Ri had one, but I never imagined she'd just show it to me like this.

'Did Ji-Hye noona give her a hint? Or did she just give it to her?'

"What's this? A gift?" I asked.

"Yeah," Kim Ye-Ri answered.

'Maybe she doesn't think Kim Hyun-Sung is fake. Or maybe she hasn't reached that conclusion yet.'

It was actually worth questioning, but I assumed the reason she thought that Kim Hyun-Sung found me weird was that I had lost my memories.

That was probably why she just showed me that bead.

'No way that's happening.'

It was a strange object, but I naturally extended my hand out toward it like it was mine from the start.

The small bead fragment suddenly erupted into a radiant light that engulfed me. I was kind of surprised because I had never expected this kind of effect

to happen, but since Ji-Hye noona was a meticulous individual, I thought it was natural for her to do this.

Rather than being surprised, I accepted it naturally.

"*Uh…*"

Kim Ye-Ri's eyes widened at the sight.

Was she trying to sense the change that was happening to me?

'What do you expect me to remember from this little thing?'

What would I get from a tiny fragment of my memories?

At this point, I had no choice but to wonder what would be a good memory.

Based on the situation, I thought remembering a slightly touching story related to Kim Ye-Ri was good, but I couldn't let this golden opportunity pass just to make her feel better.

Instead of a small memory I shared with Kim Ye-Ri, I remembered a memory that took place somewhere that was neither our continent nor Rohen.

It was a small memory I came up with on the spot.

I had a memory of someone smiling while lifting Kim Hyun-Sung with one hand.

Our Hyun-Sung was struggling while groaning in pain, but he was being devoured by a pitch-black energy. The laughter of the being shrouded by darkness pervaded the surroundings, and Kim Hyun-Sung was losing consciousness.

'Hyun-Sung… are you okay?'

Kim Hyun-Sung was bound by the pitch-black energy, and he was hanging in

the form of a cross.

The dark being smiled with satisfaction, and then it touched its own face. Its shapeless face transformed, and its body, which resembled a moving shadow, transformed into a familiar one. Chillingly enough, the dark being was mimicking Kim Hyun-Sung.

— What are you going to do…

— Do you really need to know? The only thing you can do is watch from up there…

— You… are you going to do something to Mr. Ki-Young…

'As expected, you're worried about me, Hyun-Sung.'

— You bastard!

— *Kekeke… Hahahahahaha!*

I heard the typical laughter of villains.

It was the memory of a scene I saw through Kim Hyun-Sung's eyes, thanks to the Regressor Instruction Manual. Despite my situation, the memory I recalled wasn't about myself but about Kim Hyun-Sung—my best friend.

Kim Ye-Ri clenched her fists and stared at me with eyes full of anticipation.

I had no choice but to say something to her.

Right now, I had no idea who Kim Hyun-Sung was, but there was one thing I was sure of…

"We have to save… Mr. Hyun-Sung," I said.

"…"

"Hyun-Sung… is in danger," I mumbled with a blank face. Then, I cried and

muttered, “Hyun-Sung… is in danger… Someone…”

CHAPTER 1175
A SECRET VISITOR (3)

Based on the lore, Kim Hyun-Sung was unknown to Flower Ki-Young.

One thing he was sure of was the name he just remembered and… the faint feelings he couldn't exactly remember. There was something strangely familiar and oddly comforting about Kim Hyun-Sung.

I had no idea how I learned his name, but his name filled me with an indescribable sense of longing.

'Who's… Kim Hyun-Sung?'

It was an emotion that I couldn't even understand.

'Why… am I feeling this way? Why… does his name stir this kind of emotion in me?'

I was sure it was my first time hearing his name… so why was I feeling such a deep sense of yearning?

This girl knew that I had lost my memories. Jung Ha-Yan, who appeared before me all of a sudden, also told me that I had lost my memories, but it was a different story for me since I was the one experiencing it.

Despite feeling really confused, I continued saying the same thing like a parrot.

"We have to save Mr. Hyun-Sung."

This was, of course, a classic cliche that was often used in apocalyptic stories, but there was a reason why classics were classics.

As expected, Kim Ye-Ri flinched and asked, “What did you say?”

“Mr. Hyun-Sung is in danger. No…” I mumbled.

“What… did you say just now? Oppa,” Kim Ye-Ri asked again.

“Mr. Hyun-Sung… we have to save him… We have to… Hyun-Sung… Kim Hyun-Sung…” I said.

“*Ah*.”

“Who’s… Mr. Hyun-Sung?” I asked.

“…”

“*Ack.*” I grabbed my head and started breathing heavily. I was gasping for air with teary eyes, and it made the atmosphere become even more tense.

I felt regretful at the fact that I couldn’t play some music, but I grabbed my head as if I was about to remember something, but nothing came to mind in the end. Searching for something that couldn’t be found was beyond my capacity at the moment, and Kim Ye-Ri naturally intervened.

“It’s fine,” Kim Ye-Ri said.

“*Haa… haa…”* I panted.

“You don’t have to try to remember,” Kim Ye-Ri said.

“…”

“Just now…”

“What… and… and who… are you? Actually… who’s Kim Hyun-Sung? No… we have to save him. We have to save him first… He’s in danger! He’s—we need to save him right now!” I shouted.

“…”

"…"

"Maybe that's what happened…" Kim Ye-Ri mumbled.

"Pardon?" I asked.

"It's nothing," Kim Ye-Ri said.

The emotions inside me calmed down when I saw Kim Ye-Ri maintaining her composure. I was still confused, but I knew very well I wouldn't be able to resolve everything if I was too worked up, so I had to get more information.

"Please tell me why you came here and what that strange thing was. Tell me who Kim Hyun-Sung is as well," I begged.

Kim Ye-Ri seemed to be thinking about whether telling me all the secrets was the right decision or not. She thought feeding me too much information could affect me negatively, just like the reaction I showed her just now.

She rarely made decisions, but she seemed to be acting even more cautious than usual.

After a while, she finally said, "It was a Memory Bead Fragment."

"Pardon?"

"It's a bead with a sealed memory. Don't ask me why these are all over the Rohen Continent because I don't know either," Kim Ye-Ri said.

"Do you… know me? What's happening to me? There were many times when I felt like I had forgotten something. Miss Jung Ha-Yan told me the same thing, but I don't understand what's happening to me… or what happened just now. I want to know why you came to see me and why you gave me that Memory Bead fragment," I asked.

"You won't believe me even if I tell you. You'll eventually find out… but one thing I can tell you is that you didn't come to Rohen from Earth," Kim Ye-Ri

revealed.

“Then from where…” I asked.

“Before that, I want you to tell me what you saw or what you recalled,” she requested.

She needed to confirm things, as I hadn’t revealed exactly what I had seen. If she still remembered the Doom Doom Hyun-Sung incident, then Kim Ye-Ri’s current assumption could be wrong.

‘But Ye-Ri, you got it right.’

The current version of Kim Hyun-Sung wasn’t the same Kim Hyun-Sung she knew.

“A man was trapped. It was Kim Hyun-Sung… I’m sure that man was Kim Hyun-Sung,” I said.

“…”

“A dark shadow isolated that man in a dark space, and I saw that dark shadow changing into that man. Those two were talking about something… but I don’t really remember,” I added.

“You saw the black shadow turning into Hyun-Sung oppa?” Kim Ye-Ri asked.

“I-If I’m not mistaken…” I answered.

“Are you sure?” Kim Ye-Ri questioned.

“Yes, I-I’m sure. I heard laughter and someone shouting something…” I replied.

“Damn it,” she mumbled.

Considering the fact that I made it at the last minute, it was an excellent

story.

Of course, there were flaws in the story.

I still wasn't sure how or when Kim Hyun-Sung had met that being, but that wasn't important right now. Sometimes, a person's honest words were more convincing than rational reasoning. My existence was like that, and no one could deny my honesty.

'If I just throw it at them, they'll do the work and fit it in somehow.'

Why was Lee Ki-Young thrown into Rohen?

'To run away… '

From who?

'From the fake Hyun-Sung… '

Why did it have to be Rohen?

'Because the real Kim Hyun-Sung was here, and I needed to save him.'

I could go with that story.

'At least it sounds more reasonable than blaming it on the Chanelia Hermes bag incident and the drunk Hyun-Sung.'

I could also frame it so that Jung Ha-Yan and Han Sora were basically acting as my shield. The reason I hadn't notified the guild members ahead of time was pretty obvious.

As always, Lee Ki-Young, the nice guy, had decided to bear everything alone. If a being powerful enough to seal Kim Hyun-Sung was the enemy, I couldn't say for sure that the guild members could defeat them.

No matter which direction the operation ended up going, it was an

undeniable fact that there were some risks.

I needed to rescue Kim Hyun-Sung, who was sealed in Rohen, and gather enough strength to fight the fake Kim Hyun-Sung.

I came to Rohen to protect the Blue Guild, and if I really wanted to do so, I could justify interpreting it that way.

Of course, no one could have foreseen that some being had transformed into Kim Hyun-Sung, and no one could have known that losing my memories would lead to the guild members' arrival in Rohen, but…

'I'm sure the puzzle pieces are falling in place.'

Kim Ye-Ri wasn't stupid.

I had given her so many hints, so there was no way she wouldn't understand what was happening on the surface level. Her confused face turned into certainty, which made it clear that she caught on.

The current version of Kim Hyun-Sung wasn't Kim Hyun-Sung but something else.

And they were the continent, Rohen, and the Blue Guild's enemy…

"Do you know… where Hyun-Sung oppa is sealed?" Kim Ye-Ri asked.

"I don't remember anything except for the fact that it was a dark place. I've never seen the place before. I don't know why… but I'm sure… it was Rohen. I can feel it. Kim Hyun-Sung is in Rohen right now. I want to recall his exact location, but…" I paused.

"The Memory Bead Fragment," Kim Ye-Ri said.

"Excuse me?" I asked.

"If you keep absorbing the Memory Bead fragments, you might remember

the location where the real Hyun-Sung oppa is sealed," Kim Ye-Ri suggested.

"*Ah!*"

Kim Ye-Ri was quick to catch on. I saw her tapping her thighs with her fingers. It was a habit that would come out unconsciously whenever I was deep in thought, so I was kind of surprised to see Kim Ye-Ri doing it.

She seemed to be thinking about her plans after organizing the timeline in her mind.

It was natural for her to be *this* serious, as she had just discovered that Kim Hyun-Sung was the fake one.

The being who had sealed the God of Sunset and had taken away the memories of the God of Sacrifice and Revival. The enemy's goal was still unknown, but the enemy was an explosive that we couldn't handle by ourselves.

'Yeah, even if we make a big deal out of this, we won't get anything out of it. She can be pretty level-headed when she wants to be.'

"The fake Kim Hyun-Sung is looking for the Memory Bead fragment as well," Kim Ye-Ri said.

"*Ah!*"

"I'm sure the enemy is trying to get the Memory Bead fragments so that you won't get your memories back," Kim Ye-Ri said.

"Is there a need to do that?" I asked.

"In our current state, it's impossible to face off against the fake," Kim Ye-Ri said.

"…"

“We need to find where Hyun-Sung oppa is sealed and free him. We also need to find your memories,” Kim Ye-Ri suggested.

“Pardon?” I asked.

“We need you, oppa,” Kim Ye-Ri said.

“But…”

“Come find us at the Demon King of Sunset’s Castle. We’re going to pretend like we don’t know this information for the time being. We’ll treat the fake like the real one, so just keep that in mind when you and the people of Rohen start the dungeon raid.

“There’s a chance you’ll encounter us since we’re tied to the dungeon,” Kim Ye-Ri explained.

“Does that mean we’ll have to fight you?” I asked.

This was going well.

“No, we’re going to open up the path, but only within the limits so that you won’t receive any penalties from the dungeon. Officially, the people of Rohen will succeed in clearing the dungeon, and then they’ll move toward the fake version.

“We need to build as much strength as possible to fight him,” Kim Ye-Ri answered.

‘Having experienced the Park Deok-Gu enhancement plan, she knew what she was doing.’

In other words, they would give us experience points.

‘Our Ye-Ri is really smart.’

If the Demon King of Sunset’s Castle had the basic layout of a dungeon, we

wouldn't be able to meet the other bosses until we had defeated the first boss.

With a well-executed plan, we could control the time it would take to approach the Demon King of Sunset and provide ample experience points to the people of Rohen.

Since we fought Sun Hee-Young only once, we still had no idea just how powerful the buff that the mainstream event had bestowed upon us. Three? No, if we received four more of such buffs, it would be enough.

Although it was a bit lacking compared to the continent, Rohen's overall level of strength would increase if we also obtained bonus currency and experience points.

"Until then, I'll keep bringing the Memory Bead Fragments to you. If you can fool the fake's eye even after obtaining it—"

"I honestly don't understand what's happening right now," I interrupted her.

"I understand," Kim Ye-Ri said.

"But… I know you're not the enemy, just like the Forsaken Saint," I added.

"Yeah, we're family," Kim Ye-Ri said.

"…"

"We're a real family, not tied by a familia like in Rohen," Kim Ye-Ri clarified.

I felt like she was becoming more and more emotionally aware, but her comment didn't upset me or anything.

'It actually puts me in a good mood… '

I was happy because it felt like I saw a new side of her.

I thought she was just wasting her time with Park Deok-Gu and Ahn Ki-Mo, but her ability to read the situation and her attempt to take control of it wasn't half bad.

I wasn't sure whether she could obtain full authority from Sun Hee-Young, but it was clear that she could persuade the Blue Guild members with the information she had just obtained from me.

It was to the point that I thought the new position in the Blue Guild would be a better fit for her than Han Sora.

'Our Ye-Ri has grown up to be such a fine lady.'

"I'm going to keep visiting you whenever I have time," Kim Ye-Ri said.

"Okay," I said.

"Also…"

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry," Kim Ye-Ri said.

"…"

"For always being a burden," she added.

'It's okay. You're not a burden, so don't cry.'

"For not being able to become a reliable comrade," Kim Ye-Ri continued.

'What's wrong with you? You're overreacting right now.'

"For… making you experience… difficult situations… every time…"

"…"

"This time, we'll protect you," Kim Ye-Ri vowed.

CHAPTER 1176
LEAD AND SUPPORTING ROLES (1)

When the 21st Legion Summoning incident occurred…

'It really seemed hopeless… '

Now that I had come this far, it felt like the puzzle pieces were gradually falling into place. Actually, it wasn't just a feeling. I could actually see the picture at this point.

The unexpected help from the system was the reason why things happened earlier than expected.

Of course, if the guild members hadn't worked together, I wouldn't have been able to start this at all. As someone worried about spending at least five years here, I felt kind of relieved.

'After all… '

The stage was set, and I had a clear map pointing me in the right direction.

It had been exactly thirteen days since Kim Ye-Ri left Saint Bell, and it was enough time for the players—intoxicated by their victory—to calm down. However, the fact that they were still singing songs about the Forsaken Saint and the Saint of Flower and Fertility told me that they weren't tired of the celebrations just yet.

Fortunately, most of them seemed to be focusing more on the future rather than the past.

Of course, the viewers were no exception.

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ says that she's nervous for some

reason.]

'It's because you haven't seen the secret visitor.'

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ says the Monarch of Sunset might be more ruthless and malicious than they had imagined. They're nervous as well, but they promise to support your decision.]

[The Slender Tentacle Queen♥ warns that this might be your only chance. The 21st Legion has exhausted its forces for the campaign in the north, and it's deploying troops to weird locations. They are making decisions that she doesn't really understand.]

[Lowest Abyss of the Abyss♥ warns that meeting the commander unprepared in an attempt to seize a reckless opportunity is extremely dangerous. They suggest that if you don't have a specific plan, waiting for the next opportunity might be a better option.]

[He Who Sits on the Golden Throne♥ agrees. They mumble, saying that the 21st Legion has exhausted its forces and now is the time to make a move.]

[The Wolf Crying Under the Crescent Moon warns that everyone will surely die. The mortals don't understand how powerful demon lords are. Whether you head there now or later, the result will be the same.]

[The Mistress of the Holy Night♥ is cheering for you. She hopes you'd bring peace to Rohen.]

[The Crooked Guardian is mocking you by saying that driving out the Forsaken Saint was a miracle. They shout that if you go in there half-heartedly, you'll end up in a bad situation.]

'They're going at it again.'

I had yet to say anything, but they were already in a heated debate. Of course, the topic was when I ought to raid the Demon King of Sunset's Castle. They

wouldn't stop talking about whether I ought to enter the dungeon once the players of Rohen had gotten a bit stronger or enter the dungeon at the right time, even though we weren't ready yet.

Obviously, humans were talking about the same topic as well.

The players from Arhendel, who worked wonders during the defense war of Saint Bell, and the players here were supportive of the expedition, but the newcomers thought differently.

Those intoxicated by their victory finally came back to their senses, and they realized that it was impossible to raid the Demon King of Sunset's Castle at the moment.

"Entering the Demon King of Sunset's Castle right now is out of the question. Of course I'm not questioning the Saint of Flower and Fertility's decision, but… but don't you think it's too soon?"

"If the 21st Legion is doing a campaign in the north, then this is our chance, but we just reclaimed and stabilized Saint Bell. We still need to overcome the Ashen Sunset… so how do you plan on marching toward the Demon King's Castle?"

"If we get isolated somewhere before we reach the Demon King of Sunset's Castle…"

Of course, their reasons for opposing the decision were all pretty reasonable.

'It's honestly a crazy thing to do.'

If it weren't for the secret visitor, I wouldn't recommend marching to the castle this early.

We were basically charging into the heart of the enemy just because we somehow managed to protect our front yard.

The castle was far from Saint Bell, and we had to pass through many areas to

get there. Considering how many troops the allied forces had sacrificed to push out the Ashen Sunset in the Saint Bell recapture operation, their reaction was only natural.

Basically, we would have to keep marching through the Ashen Sunset Region to each the Demon King of Sunset's Castle.

We would have to overcome enemy traps in areas that had probably changed by now. If issues were to pop up during our journey, we'd become isolated within the Ashen Sunset Region.

Since they had no knowledge about my deal with Kim Ye-Ri, everything was uncertain in their eyes.

'It's all part of the plan.'

"I'm getting tired because it feels like I'm repeating myself each time. Like I said, this is our only chance. The Ashen Sunset region has already advanced quite a bit towards the northern region… and if the 21st Legion succeeds in their campaign, it'll be impossible to go against them," I said.

"But…"

"We won't be marching blindly. The rangers have confirmed that the troops are retreating from the regions connected to Saint Bell, and they've secured areas where we can create safe zones," I added.

"*Hmm…*"

"Of course, it's going to be a difficult march. We might not be able to rest properly, but despite that, we still have to do this," I told them.

"…"

"In addition, I'm not holding this meeting to debate whether we should execute the plan or not. The goal is to come together and figure out if there are better alternatives or other ideas," I explained.

'You bunch of idiots.'

They probably felt embarrassed by the fact that they were whining constantly, as they started asking more constructive questions.

"Can I ask… what you're going to do about the supplies? If it's going to be a long march like you mentioned…"

There were potential issues, but at least in Rohen, extended marches rarely led to significant supply issues.

"I'm going to use coins," I answered.

"Pardon?"

"If we run out of supplies, I'll cover them using coins," I clarified.

This place had a coin system, and if we implemented this system on our continent, many adventurers would cheer in joy. Supplies were always an issue when it came to extended expeditions and dungeon expeditions.

Especially when it came to high-level dungeons… No one could say for sure when they would be able to conquer such dungeons, so we would sometimes spend weeks debating how to handle the supplies.

From deciding which supplies to carry, selecting the right combat rations, to preparing camping equipment and everyday necessities, the list would go on.

Ultimately, we established a separate support unit.

However, this place was different. At least in Rohen, one wouldn't have to deal with such an issue, but despite that, they weren't making full advantage of it, so…

'It means it's not worth spending their coins.'

As expected, I noticed some of them exchanging looks, trying to read the room.

“I know what all of you think about coins and that you don’t want to waste your precious coins on simple things like supplies, but it’s necessary,” I told them.

“When you say coins…”

“Think of it as an investment. As you might have noticed, every action related to the mainstream event has an impact on the settlement… so, for those of you here, voluntarily spending your coins might be helpful in the future,” I explained.

“I… see.”

“The rankers… no, we don’t even need to go that far. Just think about the quality of the items that the players who made it onto the list obtained as rewards, I don’t think you’d be at a disadvantage,” I added.

“…”

“Also…” I paused.

“…”

“You need to be alive to use the coins. They become useless when you die. Always remember that this battle is about the fate of humanity. I believe no one will hesitate to spend coins in a fight that could decide Rohen’s fate,” I continued.

“You are absolutely right, sir.”

“Additionally, should humanity win, you’ll have the opportunity to settle the coins you’ve spent when the reward distribution takes place later. Unless you need to increase your stats right now… I believe everyone should spend their coins by purchasing supplies,” I told them.

“Understood.”

‘I have to do this much to make it less difficult to spend.’

“If there are no other objections, I’ll end the meeting here. Also, if anyone here wants to back out of this expedition, please don’t hesitate to let me know,” I said.

Obviously, no one wanted to back out.

‘That’s just human nature.’

I had proven my worth through Operation: Dawn and the Army of the Forsaken Saint.

There were always risks, but it was human nature to cling to a strange sense of hope. It was scary to die a meaningless death, but for those in high positions, they were generally more scared of being left behind on their own.

After delivering my last words, I walked outside and was greeted by the same view as always.

There were people busy moving around, preparing for the expedition, and some were busy training with their respective groups. Supplies were flooding in from the nearby cities, and there were people trying to take part in the expedition.

“I’m sorry, but Level 2 players… cannot join the expedition.”

“Please accept me. I’ll even carry the supplies. I really want to join. I can’t look the other way when Rohen is in danger.”

‘There are people like them.’

Those involved in production were also busy.

‘I don’t think I need to check on them… ‘

I couldn't help but keep looking around.

'Is there anyone useful around here?'

I had to increase our chances of success by even the slightest margin.

Our continent had successfully driven out the Outer Gods, and we overcame many crises because we had Tier 1 adventurers like Kim Hyun-Sung, Cha Hee-Ra, and Jung Ha-Yan, but one couldn't underestimate the support that Tier 2 and 3 adventurers could offer.

People like Cheon Kwan-Wi, the Mist Summoner, Colonel Smith before he joined the guild, Sniper Yu Ran, Hunting Dog Lee Joo-Hyuk, and Elias, who kept things in order in their respective positions.

There were many more people in Tier 3.

The people who came to my mind right away were Galoshik of Garosh and Cash… Kim Mi-Ju… as well as Lee Chul-Woo and Gook Minji of the Frienship Guild, whom I met as Lee Ki-Yeon.

They were quite influential because they spent a lot of money at the time.

There were a few people in the neutral nation of Laios, the Federation, and the Union of Kingdoms. There were even more named adventurers in the Republic, as they were keeping the Tier 3 adventurers in order.

'I'm sure Commander Jin knows better than I do… '

Obviously, Rohen needed people like them as well, which was why I decided to observe the people one by one.

'There's no time.'

I decided to hire people using coins, buy items for them, and change their jobs, but I would only do that if they had the potential.

“Excuse me… Miss Kathy?” I said.

“*Huh?* Me? D-Did you call for me? Commander!” Kathy greeted.

“*Ah*, are you available to talk right now?” I asked.

“Yes! Of course!” Kathy answered.

Just like this.

The stage was set, so I just needed to find the actors.

“…”

“…”

After suggesting a job change to one person, I took another look around the city to find suitable recruits.

Just then, I saw a blond, tanned punk making his way into the city in the distance. It had been a long while since I saw him, and one thing was for sure—the lead actor had returned to reclaim his role.

“It’s been a while,” Woo Hyo-Yeol greeted.

“Yes! It’s been a while, Mr. Hyo-Yeol. Have all of you been doing well?” I asked.

CHAPTER 1177
LEAD AND SUPPORTING ROLES (2)

"*Ah!*" Jung Ha-Yan exclaimed, and I saw her running toward Nam Goong-Seon and Lim Chae-Ryeong. Lim Chae-Ryeong seemed kind of scared of Jung Ha-Yan, but Nam Goong-Seon seemed happy to see her.

What surprised me was her attitude toward Nam Goong-Seon. Perhaps she reminded Jung Ha-Yan of her older sister back on Earth, but she seemed to like her. She didn't jump into her arms like she would do with me or Han Sora, but…

"I-I-It's been a while…" Jung Ha-Yan greeted.

"Yes, it really has been a while," Nam Goong-Seon greeted back.

I was surprised to see Jung Ha-Yan walking toward her in a hurry and lowering her head before talking to her as if she were shy.

Nam Goong-Seon didn't seem to have any intentions of pushing her away. Instead, she patted Jung Ha-Yan's head and hugged her as if she was looking out for her.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young, have you been doing well too?" Nam Goong-Seon asked.

"Hope you've been well, Mr. Ki-Young," Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

"Yes, I've been doing well, Miss Seon and Miss Chae-Ryeong," I replied.

'I wonder if Nam Goong-Seon is the same age as Ha-Yan's older sister.'

I wasn't sure, but I had a feeling they were around the same age.

Jung Ha-Yan didn't really like talking about her family, so I never really asked

for the details, but before she was abandoned, I heard her oldest sister had taken on the role of her parents. Perhaps they were similar, as even in my eyes, Nam Goong-Seon looked like a warm, caring guardian.

"A-About my friend S-S-Sora I told you about last time…" Jung Ha-Yan said.

"Yes, I remember. *Oh!* Can we meet her? I'm excited!" Nam Goong-Seon said.

"Yeah, I-I'll introduce you to her… S-Sora. C-Can you come over here?" she asked.

"Okay, Miss Jung Ha-Yan," Han Sora answered.

"It's nice to meet you. I've heard a lot about you from Miss Jung Ha-Yan. I'm Nam Goong-Seon," she said, introducing herself.

"I'm… Han Sora. We were best friends before we came here… Anyway, it's nice to meet you," Han Sora greeted her.

I thought they'd have some sort of connection, but that didn't seem to be the case. I could see Han Sora's eyes narrowing, and I saw her quietly pulling Jung Ha-Yan toward her…

It was like she was trying to figure out what kind of person Nam Goong-Seon was. Considering the fact that there had been countless people trying to make use of Jung Ha-Yan, her reaction was to be expected, but…

'That seems a bit too careless.'

I had taken my time picking them out.

"I heard a lot about you as well… Could I ask how you met Miss Jung Ha-Yan?" Nam Goong-Seon asked.

'She's being too overprotective.'

"So…" Han Sora started.

“Funny how you two met,” Nam Goong-Seon interrupted her.

“Yes, it was a… coincidence,” Han Sora mumbled.

It was clear that Han Sora was gathering information about how they met or what she did, but there was no need for me to feel bothered about it.

Moreover, I was busy dealing with Lim Chae-Ryeong.

“You are listening to me, right?” Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

“Yes,” I answered.

“So we entered two dungeons. I can’t count how many times we went out to hunt… We just ended up sleeping outside. No! We didn’t even have time to sleep. He was really pushing us to our limits… I actually missed you, Mr. Lee Ki-Young.

“*Ah!* By the way, I saw it! The mainstream event, Army of the Forsaken Saint! You were the first one to clear it! You’re really amazing,” Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

“…”

“We had another raid scheduled, but after seeing that, Hyo-Yeol oppa suggested we head to Saint Bell right away. He looked so nervous, but he didn’t know that. He’s not honest with his feelings…” Lim Chae-Ryeong revealed.

“Stop talking nonsense, you idiot,” Woo Hyo-Yeol joined in.

“Nagging as always,” she said.

“*Hahaha*…” I laughed.

“I get exhausted physically, but dealing with that personality of his is the most difficult thing to do ever,” Lim Chae-Ryeong complained.

“*Haha…*”

“But still… the result was pretty good,” Lim Chae-Ryeong added.

“…”

“What do you think, Mr. Lee Ki-Young?” Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

“Pardon?” I asked.

“Do you think we’ve gotten a little stronger?” Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

“…”

“…”

Her question made me raise my head to look at her.

I had actually looked at everyone’s stats before we left each other’s side, and…

‘I can see that she has grown a lot stronger.’

I was honestly kind of surprised.

I disliked the fact that she was stuck at Level 3, but…

‘She intentionally refused to level up.’

She was like a weaker version of Woo Hyo-Yeol.

Of course, there was a huge difference between the two, but just like how Swordsman Kim Hyun-Sung and Assassin Kim Ye-Ri had a similar combat style, Woo Hyo-Yeol seemed to have had a huge influence on Lim Chae-Ryeong.

I never really wanted to be blunt, but… if I were to evaluate how much she had grown, I’d say she was good enough to join the Black Swan Guild. Of

course, I wasn't overevaluating her abilities.

She was still young, and she had the potential to grow stronger, but the stats I was seeing weren't so bad. I liked her combat prowess, but I also liked the fact that she had skills that were often found on rangers, such as tracking and erasing traces.

"*Hehe*, I see that you're surprised. It turns out I do have some talent, after all," Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

"…"

Of course, she wasn't good enough to move up to Tier 2.

Belier, the newest member of the Blue Guild, was recruited because of her natural talent and instincts, but the problem was that she never really had the chance to show her potential.

There was such a huge difference between them that I felt bad about comparing the two, but…

'There's no guarantee that she can't be better than Belier.'

While the Blue Guild could easily handle a rare and unique job like Belier's Magic Fist Fighter, most guilds, including the Black Swan Guild, would probably prefer a more conventional adventurer like Lim Chae-Ryeong.

"*Ah*, tell me already! What do you think?" Lim Chae-Ryeong asked again.

"You've changed a lot to the point that I'm kind of surprised," I answered.

"I knew it! But there's something even more surprising. Have you heard? Dam-Hye unni finally changed jobs as well! She even reached Level 5!" Lim Chae-Ryeong revealed.

"…"

“What was her job again…” Lim Chae-Ryeong mumbled.

No Dam-Hye, who was quiet all this time, chimed in.

“*Ah…* so… hold on. It was the Bard of Melodies.”

‘Yeah, you never really stood out, to be honest.’

Although she had a non-combatant job, she had always been a Level 5 adventurer, and her talent in magic surpassed most talented people. If I could just replace her starving musical GENIUS and give her a combat job, she could climb her way up on her own.

“I think I can… cast buffs… on you now,” No Dam-Hye added.

“That’s good news,” I told her.

“I’ve been feeling bad… because I wasn’t good at anything… so I’m glad I can start helping out…” No Dam-Hye mumbled.

“It’s amazing. Whenever Dam-Hye unni starts singing, there’s always this surge of energy, and she can even heal my wounds. On top of that, she put the monsters to sleep… Honestly, it’s thanks to her that I was able to get through the tough raid schedule. You know, right?” Lim Chae-Ryeong explained.

‘Know what?’

“Even potions and holy power can’t get rid of fatigue, but Dam-Hye unni’s spells can actually do that. How do you think we were able to keep going without getting any sleep?” Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

‘Yeah, I got it.’

“Of course, it’s also because of our passion and the will to keep going!” Lim Chae-Ryeong shouted.

It seemed that she had become more talkative in the meantime. Woo Hyo-Yeol had to have become used to it because he took out a pair of earplugs, plugged them into his ears, leaned on a pillar while crossing his arms.

“What about Miss Seon?” I asked.

“*Ah!* Regarding unni!”

While I let Lim Chae-Ryeong’s voice go in through one ear and out the other, I turned to look at the last remaining individual.

“What else is there to say about her? I can’t even beat her anymore, despite having a melee job…” Lim Chae-Ryeong mumbled.

‘She’s the most surprising.’

I already expected it, but it seemed like focusing on being a holy knight before leaving wasn’t a bad decision.

Her holy power wasn’t enough for her to become a priest, so rather than keep attempting to increase that lackluster stat, it was better to focus on her other stats, and it truly led to a decent outcome.

Her Stamina, Strength, and Agility had increased significantly.

I could no longer see her poor equipment.

“Also, this is a secret… but I think Hyo-Yeol oppa likes her,” Lim Chae-Ryeong revealed.

“It’s not even worth responding to,” Woo Hyo-Yeol commented.

“What? I know I’m right! Who wouldn’t notice when you’re making it so obvious? You kept swapping her equipment! And you even got her a really good job! I’m still a Level 3 Dagger Rogue! Unni is a Level 4 Mysterious Holy Knight!” Lim Chae-Ryeong complained.

“I simply gave her equipment because she needed it the most,” Woo Hyo-Yeol told her.

“Even if that’s the case, it’s a huge difference,” Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

“I’m sure I told you that I would reward you based on your efforts, and in my eyes, she was working the hardest,” Woo Hyo-Yeol argued.

‘Why did he plug those earplugs if he was going to listen in anyway? He’s… ‘

I saw Nam Goong-Seon lowering her head slightly as if she was embarrassed.

‘Yeah, I can see it.’

‘Just how hard you worked… ‘

I was not saying that Lim Chae-Ryeong and No Dam-Hye hadn’t worked hard, but I could tell that Nam Goong-Seon had been working harder than the two.

Her hands, which had no calluses the last time I saw them, were now wrapped tightly in bandages. There were scars on her face as well. If I had seen her in this state the first time we met, I would’ve mistaken her for a veteran mercenary.

Obviously, I knew why she had been working so hard.

“I’m sure grandpa will be surprised as well,” I said.

It was because of *his* sacrifice.

“It seemed like yesterday when he offered to teach me how to use a shield…” Nam Goong-Seon said.

“You’re right…” I mumbled.

The mood instantly became gloomy. Everyone would never forget what happened that day, and they would also never forget the old warrior’s

sacrifice.

The old warrior brought us together and gave us the courage to step into the outside world,

'He's probably doing well, right?'

"…"

"…"

"Hey! Stop being so gloomy! It's been a while since we saw each other! Let's talk about Gramps later and catch up for now. I'm exhausted since we ran all the way here as soon as the expedition was over.

"Let's eat… or should we get a drink together? Maybe it's too early to drink," Lim Chae-Ryeong suggested.

"*Hmph*, you're talking without a care in the world," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"You're always picking on me. Only me!" Lim Chae-Ryeong complained.

"We can catch up later," Woo Hyo-Yeol told her.

"…"

Woo Hyo-Yeol looked at me quietly and asked, "Do you think…"

"Yes?"

"Do you think we finally reached the standards you had in mind?"

'So he's been thinking about what I told him before we left each other's side.'

It felt like I had no choice but to nod, so I nodded slightly.

I saw a tiny smile tugging at his lips.

“In that case, sign us up for the expedition,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

‘You sign up, you jerk.’

“Okay!” I answered. Of course, I answered energetically and nodded to keep up with my image as Flower Ki-Young.

However, I became hesitant when I heard his next question.

“Also…”

“Yes?”

“Where’s William?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“Why are you suddenly—”

“That’s none of your business. Just tell me where he is,” Woo Hyo-Yeol interrupted me.

Perhaps he thought he had gotten stronger and wanted to take this opportunity for a rematch to settle the score from back then…

‘But he’s just going to beat you again… ‘

He still wasn’t strong enough to face William, who had gone through more than five hundred regressions. William could now draw a crimson flower using nothing but his sword.

‘He can draw a crimson flower using nothing but his sword, damn it.’

CHAPTER 1178
LEAD AND SUPPORTING ROLES (3)

"He's probably working right now," I answered.

"It doesn't matter. Take me to him, Lee Ki-Young," Woo Hyo-Yeol commanded.

'Why can't you understand how I feel?'

'If you go there now, your pride will get hurt.'

Woo Hyo-Yeol wasn't weak. At a mere glance, I could tell that he had worked hard to regain his former form.

The problem was that he *only* worked hard; he still didn't have the same stats that he had during his first life.

He seemed like he was stuck between phases and needed time to actually get back on track. The fact that he wanted to duel against William in his current state seemed like he was desperately trying to hurt himself.

Moreover…

'Even if he finds the form he had in his past life, I don't know if that will be enough to beat William.'

After five hundred regressions, Will of Flower and Fertility had grown incredibly powerful. The current version of William was a lot stronger than the William in Woo Hyo-Yeol's first life.

I wasn't sure about anything else, but William was definitely stronger in one-on-one duels. It was true that his inexperience had left him without a weapon that would naturally appear over time, but William's crimson flower carried such powerful symbolism that it could easily cover his flaws.

Kim Hyun-Sung's Sword of Sunset, Will's Crimson Flower, and Hee-Ra noona's Red God of War were their signature moves.

Those moves were so powerful that they could instantly turn the tables.

"Why are you looking for Mr. William?" I asked.

"I'm sure I told you that it's none of your business," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"If you're trying to get in a meaningless fight with them, I suggest you do otherwise. We're at a critical juncture," I warned him.

"I'm trying to meet him *because* we're at a critical juncture. Figuring out the enemy's patterns is important, but knowing the patterns of our allies is just as important," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"You just had to do this as soon as you got here," I commented.

"Strike while the iron is hot," Woo Hyo-Yeol remarked.

"Wait…"

'He's overconfident… '

Perhaps getting beaten could be a good thing, but then again, it would hurt his pride.

Woo Hyo-Yeol started walking away as if he no longer wanted to hear my words.

The party members stared at him in a daze, but…

"Miss Sora, please register the party members. It should be fine if you give them my name," I instructed her.

"Okay, sub—I mean, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," Han Sora said.

"Let's eat dinner together, Mr. Ki-Young!" Lim Chae-Ryeong shouted.

“Okay! Mr. Woo Hyo-Yeol… you should eat with us if you have time,” I suggested.

Woo Hyo-Yeol walked with big, confident strides, but his mood felt more like someone going to meet the leader of a rival school gang.

‘Hyo-Yeol, you punk. After regressing and aging twice as much, you still don’t know how to behave like a grown-up.’

After moving to where the Flower and Fertility Familia was located, Woo Hyo-Yeol looked like he was trying to find the best fighter in the school.

“Where’s William?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“Mr. Woo Hyo-Yeol! Please don’t do this!” I begged.

Obviously, I had to act as if I were desperately trying to stop him.

“Saint Ki-Young, is this…”

“I’m sorry. Mr. Hyo-Yeol seems to be—”

“Didn’t you hear me? Where’s William?” Woo Hyo-Yeol interrupted me.

It was getting noisy. The blond-haired, tanned thug was throwing a tantrum and was demanding the presence of the war hero. His actions were enough to grab Saint Bell’s attention.

“What’s going on?”

Even the guards, who were supposed to maintain order, were walking toward us. The leaders of the other familias and the officers in the command center glanced this way.

Perhaps Woo Hyo-Yeol wanted to take on the role of the expedition team’s troublemaker.

“Who’s that?”

“I think his name was Woo Hyo-Yeol. He’s the party leader of the Saint of Flower and Fertility’s party. I heard he arrived in Saint Bell today.”

“Why is he causing a commotion in front of the Flower and Fertility members?”

“I’m not sure… Maybe it’s because of the Saint of Flower and Fertility…”

‘Hey, extras, it’s nothing like that.’

“*Ah*, maybe he hasn’t officially left the party. He wasn’t part of the familia from the start, right?”

“He’s still not part of the familia.”

“*Tsk, tsk.* He’s called the Genius Commander and Saint, but he clearly lacks social experience… It’s not good to get caught up in scandals like this right before an expedition.”

“He should’ve resolved the issue with his party ahead of time. Seems like his contract with that thug’s party isn’t over yet… Not even the Flower and Fertility Familia can…”

I really had to shut those guys up. They instantly turned me into the guy who joined the Flower and Fertility Familia without resolving the issues I had with my previous party.

“I won’t say it again. You. Bring out. William,” Woo Hyo-Yeol demanded.

Obviously, the members of the Flower and Fertility Familia looked hostile. He uttered William’s name as if William were some kind of dog, and his words could easily be taken as a challenge to the familia’s authority.

It was different from the mistake Hyo-Yeol had made the first time he met William. Back then, it was a mistake made by a rookie who had just cleared

the tutorial dungeon.

The reason they hadn't done anything yet was that I was showing them that I wanted to mediate this situation. Frankly speaking, he would have no excuse if they started pummeling him right now.

And that was when I heard a voice behind me…

"What's going on?"

The members of the Flower and Fertility Familia opened a path, and I saw the speaker.

'It's obviously Will.'

The meeting between the best fighter from the neighboring school and the best fighter from our school was enough to hype up the onlookers, but unfortunately, Will seemed like he had no intention of putting on a show for them.

"Could you please step aside?"

I was sure everyone wanted to watch the drama, but the onlookers had no reason to ignore his words. Regret hung in the air as they scattered slowly, and Will turned to Woo Hyo-Yeol, who was staring at him.

"Follow me," Will said.

'Follow me to the roof[1]*.'*

"*Hmph.*"

"Mr. William, this is—"

"I'll take care of this, Mr. Lee Ki-Young," William interrupted me.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Woo Hyo-Yeol commented.

“I don’t know what you want… but it looks like my assumption was correct,” William said.

“…”

‘Don’t act like a bunch of delinquents, guys.’

“I won’t criticize you for your childish behavior. We actually need someone like you here,” William said.

“You talk too much,” Woo Hyo-Yeol criticized.

“I don’t mean to sound formal, but… can I ask why you came here?” William asked.

“It’s to beat you up, of course,” Woo Hyo-Yeol answered.

“Is that so?”

‘You’re the one who’s going to get beaten up.’

Honestly, Will was a really considerate guy. I wouldn’t be surprised if William decided to publicly humiliate Woo Hyo-Yeol, but instead of doing that, William called him aside to scold him privately.

There was no need for a lengthy conversation, as the reason behind this encounter was pretty clear.

William raised his sword.

Woo Hyo-Yeol jumped and got ready to fight.

Obviously, masters can recognize other masters.

As soon as William raised his sword, Woo Hyo-Yeol looked puzzled—a sense of disconnection. He wasn’t the same William he knew, and I was sure he was different from the William he met in his first life.

It was understandable.

After all, William had died five hundred times, allowing him to become stronger both physically and mentally.

“Come,” William said.

“*Hmph.*”

However, Hyo-Yeol didn’t run.

Instead, he lunged toward Will with his sword in a reverse grip. It was a fast, powerful, and unpredictable move. Rather than just being quick, he used every muscle in his body to push himself forward, and his first move was undeniably impressive.

It was explosive and dynamic.

Like a rubber band, he sprang from his spot and appeared behind Will. In an instant, he swung his sword. However, Will took a step forward and then to the side, blocking the ambush.

“*Ha!*”

After releasing an annoying shout, Hyo-Yeol tried to swing his sword again, but…

“It’s clearly… not going to land.’

The skill gap between the two was still massive.

In fact, it had increased, and I was sure Woo Hyo-Yeol felt that better than anyone.

‘He was certain that he had grown even stronger.’

I wasn’t sure how Woo Hyo-Yeol was evaluating his own growth, but his

development was exceptional. Carrying Raymond Bolt's legacy, he worked desperately. At this stage, comparing himself to the version of him in his first life was out of the question.

'It's like he had some kind of lucky break or something.'

"This is fun," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"…"

'Is this really fun?'

"It's fun," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

'It doesn't look fun at all. You… '

The more their swords clashed, the angrier Woo Hyo-Yeol became.

He realized that Will was coaching him through this spar. Rather than saying that his goal was to hurt Woo Hyo-Yeol's pride, he was trying to train him so that he could become a powerful force during the Demon King of Sunset's Castle raid.

For a beast with a lot of pride, this was the greatest humiliation ever.

"You act all high and mighty for being part of the Family and Fertility Familia!" Woo Hyo-Yeol shouted.

His eyes turned red with fury, and he started moving aggressively.

Unable to perform a stab at such a close distance, he let go of his sword and tried to grab William's wrist to dislocate the latter's arm. However, there was no way William would let that happen.

Will remained calm, seemingly unaffected by Woo Hyo-Yeol's unpredictable movements.

Since he had already realized Woo Hyo-Yeol's goal…

'He can see his moves.'

It was proof that there was a difference in their skill level, but…

'Strangely, I feel like he's getting faster.'

Woo Hyo-Yeol seemed to be capable of becoming even stronger the more cornered he felt, as I saw him launching an attack that sent a shiver down my spine.

Will, who had been calmly parrying his attacks, no longer looked as relaxed as earlier.

The sight told me that my assumption was right.

"You bastard!"

Woo Hyo-Yeol, who targeted William's chest, moved back upon getting parried.

The moment Will instinctively extended his sword toward the retreating Woo Hyo-Yeol, Woo Hyo-Yeol bounced forward.

'It's really interesting.'

That was a technique even Kim Hyun-Sung couldn't do… He was clearly in a disadvantageous situation, yet somehow, he launched himself in the other direction, making it seem like he was completely defying the laws of physics.

'Not even monsters can do that.'

And when Woo Hyo-Yeol finally managed to get close to William…

A crimson flower bloomed.

There was a *fwoosh*, and I saw Woo Hyo-Yeol getting blasted away.

“Damn it…” Woo Hyo-Yeol mumbled.

“…”

“…”

‘You’re still alive, right?’

Woo Hyo-Yeol collapsed to the floor. He seemed to be frustrated because he kept mumbling something while sprawled out on the ground.

Of course, I had no choice but to shout.

“Mr. William!”

“*Ah…*”

“What do you think you’re doing?!” I yelled at him.

It was Woo Hyo-Yeol’s fault, but I decided to criticize William instead.

“I’m sorry. I should’ve held back… but it happened before I realized it…” William apologized.

I was taking Woo Hyo-Yeol’s side, but as someone full of pride, I was sure this entire situation only made him feel stressed. He was the type who couldn’t handle others being considerate of him.

Of course, regardless of the result, I wanted to praise him. Honestly, I thought their skill gap was so big that there was no need for William to use his crimson flower, but Woo Hyo-Yeol…

‘Made him do that… ‘

To be honest, I never really doubted him, but… Woo Hyo-Yeol truly had the potential to become even stronger. However, I needed to think a little more about the best way to make him evolve.

"..."

"..."

'Whenever we're short on time, evolving in a dark way is the most efficient choice.'

For a moment, I recalled the nightmare called Skull Gray Hyun-Sung, but evolving in that way didn't seem to be so bad for Woo Hyo-Yeol's case.

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1. A famous line from the Korean movie "Once Upon A Time In High School" ☜

CHAPTER 1179
LEAD AND SUPPORTING ROLES (4)

As always, forbidden power was something one could easily obtain.

They usually had small side effects, but they could drastically shorten the time one would need to become even stronger, and they offered destructive power that was just as powerful as one would obtain through normal routes.

Of course, I wasn't exactly happy about the side effect of losing consciousness, but I couldn't help but think that Woo Hyo-Yeol was different from Kim Hyun-Sung.

Unlike Kim Hyun-Sung, Templar Gen, William, and others who used well-honed swordsmanship, Woo Hyo-Yeol was the type who relied on his sharp instincts and maximizing his physical abilities.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to call him a beast with a blade since his fighting style relied purely on raw instincts.

When comparing him to our lovely regressor, I'd take Kim Hyun-Sung's side in all aspects, but at least, Woo Hyo-Yeol had the advantage when it came to perception and combat instincts.

It was to the point that I thought he was better than Hee-Ra noona in that aspect.

Noona was born as a powerful adventurer, so perhaps there was no need for her to rely on the Perception stat, but Woo Hyo-Yeol was even more savage than Cha Hee-Ra, which meant that it was one of the few advantages that he had over her.

'It's just something I thought about… '

But it seemed to be more effective than I thought…

'It's probably best to go with the enhancement route, right?'

Rather than going with techniques like Kim Hyun-Sung's Sword of Sunset and William's Crimson Flower, it was better to take the same path as Hee-Ra noona, which meant I had to strengthen him physically…

'Should I look into a demon he can get into a contract with?'

There was probably no need for me to go that far. A contract with a low-ranking demon could actually lower his potential instead of increasing it. It made the most sense to consider a contract with a demon of at least crow-level power or make him awaken on his own.

"We couldn't eat dinner together because of a certain someone," Lim Chae-Ryeong complained.

"…"

"I knew you had a strange sense of confidence from the moment I saw you, but I just can't figure out what he's thinking. I mean, how does someone who's barely been here for a year have the guts to face off against William of the Flower and Fertility Familia?

"It's a miracle that he's even alive," Lim Chae-Ryeong continued.

'Yeah, I agree.'

"We're in a state of emergency… This is the kind of situation where William could use any excuse and take his head for the sake of discipline. He's so reckless," Lim Chae-Ryeong added.

'Don't be so blunt. You're going to hurt his feelings.'

Only if he could hear her…

It felt like he was sleeping for quite a while now.

I thought perhaps he wasn't waking up because he felt humiliated, but his wound was so serious that I couldn't make that kind of suspicion.

It was so bad that I thought he needed some time to recover, even after receiving treatment. If it wasn't for his beast-like recovery, he would need at least two months of recovery.

"I'll look after Mr. Hyo-Yeol, so you can go and rest, Miss Chae-Ryeong," I told her.

"*Ah*… do you mind?" Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

'She's not even rejecting it.'

"I don't mind. I'm sure you're exhausted, coming all the way to Saint Bell…" I answered.

"I feel kind of bad, but… if you're offering… *ahem… ahem…"* Lim Chae-Ryeong said. She quickly left the room, afraid that I would change my mind.

'She's not cut out for this.'

Some time later, Woo Hyo-Yeol's finger moved. The problem was that he didn't wake up even after that. When I left the room, I started hearing things breaking in the room.

As expected, he was breaking things in the room out of fury.

"Mr. Hyo-Yeol!" I shouted and entered the room.

I saw Woo Hyo-Yeol glaring at me.

'Why the hell is he glaring at me?'

I was sure he had no idea what to say, and it was proven by how he didn't

even swear at me, but it felt like he was demanding that I leave the room.

He wanted time alone because he was embarrassed.

'That's not going to work, damn it.'

Based on the character lore, the twenty-three-year-old Flower Ki-Young was so innocent that he was slow-witted. The right move would be to act as if I were offering him full support.

'We're close now, right?'

"You're awake," I said.

"…"

"Are you okay?" I asked.

"…"

He still had communication issues. If we had the same relationship as the first time we met, I would have scolded or mocked Woo Hyo-Yeol for his foolishness, but…

'Actually, I think he wants me to scold him.'

The current situation was different. I looked and acted as if I were sincerely worried about him. I really looked like I was relieved that he regained consciousness. I was sure that sight made Woo Hyo-Yeol feel weird.

"Could I take a look at your wound?" I asked.

"No need," Woo Hyo-Yeol replied.

"Please don't be like this. I just need—"

"I just told you that you don't need to do that," Woo Hyo-Yeol interrupted me.

“I’m just worried,” I said.

“It’s nothing you need to worry about, and it’s none of your business either,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

‘Why is he being so stubborn? You still don’t get what kind of person I am? Damn it.’

He was essentially taking out his anger on others, even though he was the one who had made a mistake. He was being defensive; he was embarrassed, and he had no idea what to say.

He was refusing to talk because he was ashamed. This level of humiliation could cause our relationship to revert to the way it was before. I had to be careful, so I decided to get angry.

“I’m worried!” I shouted.

It wasn’t like me to shout like this.

“What?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

My sudden outburst surprised him. Then, I saw him looking at me quietly, and I saw my reflection in his eyes. My face was pale; my body and eyes were shaking. My breathing was unstable as well.

It was kind of hard to guess the answer, but Woo Hyo-Yeol probably knew why I was acting this way. I couldn’t help but see Raymond Bolt when looking at Woo Hyo-Yeol’s wounds.

‘I don’t… want to lose any more comrades… ‘

“…”

‘I don’t want to experience it again.’

The fear of losing another ally. Despite thinking that I had overcome it all, the

memories of that day were still in my mind. The entire party was suffering from Raymond Bolt syndrome, so Hyo-Yeol quickly caught on.

"*Hmph*."

"…"

"The wound isn't that serious," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

'Really? You say that but you became unconscious when you lost blood.'

"His sword didn't cut that deep. I know what you're worried about, but you really don't need to worry. This kind of wound is nothing," Woo Hyo-Yeol reassured me.

I pitied him a bit because he looked like he was trying to save face by saying that it didn't really hurt, but I decided to let it go. In any case, we were in a situation where we could talk.

"If that's the case… then I'm glad," I said.

"…"

"Actually, I take that back. How could you act so recklessly?" I scolded him.

"…"

"You haven't changed at all from when you were at the academy. I don't know why you rushed in like that, but it was really reckless. I know you've always been reckless, but what you did was unnecessary," I continued.

"…"

"You're strong and you'll become even more powerful," I added.

'I'm going to help you evolve.'

Skull Gray Hyun-Sung and the disgusting Bahamut were the only dark

evolutions I was involved in, but one failed, while the other was a masterpiece.

However, that failure was a mistake. If I were to do it properly, Woo Hyo-Yeol would have an ultimate move like William's. Actually, it would be more like a passive skill since he would be taking the enhancement path.

There was a reason dark evolution was easy to do. When it came to normal evolution, things like the target's mental state, their backstory, and the scheme were important, but when it came to dark evolution, the key factors were much simpler.

'One of them just has to die, and that's all it would take… '

Once someone who had reached a certain level was consumed by raw emotions like anger, and it became too much for them to handle, a path would naturally open up for them.

While there was a difference in how one could trigger it as well as the methods used to do so, it was still easier compared to the normal evolutions.

For someone like Woo Hyo-Yeol, who was already qualified for an evolution, only one thing was needed…

'We need to become closer.'

We had become a bit closer since the Raymond Bolt incident, but if I were to die right now, my death wouldn't consume him with fury at all.

Helplessness and inferiority could be effective, but they needed to blend well with his main emotions for them to be effective. For instance, if he ended up losing his comrades because of his flaws…

That was worth trying…

I stopped nagging, and Woo Hyo-Yeol fell into deep contemplation.

“You.”

“Yes?”

“What the hell did you do to William?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked, speaking bluntly.

“Excuse me?” I asked.

‘It’s only natural for him to ask that question.’

It was only natural for him to suspect something since William had gotten insanely stronger compared to his first life. The only difference was that I was beside him, and I played a part in the first match back at the academy.

Obviously, explaining this to him was easy because there was no need for me to hide it from him.

“It’ll take a while for me to explain everything. I didn’t really do anything… he actually appeared in my dream world. Actually, I don’t know if that’s the right way to describe it, but… anyway, Mr. William and I spent a lot of time in that dream.”

“…”

“He fought one demon over five hundred times… and he died over five hundred times. It became so unbearable that he wanted to run away… but in the end, he pulled through. What you just witnessed was the result of that,” I explained.

“I see,” he said.

I continued the conversation after that because I needed to explain the backstory.

It talked about the possibility that *something* was sealed inside me; the demons were after that *particular being*, and that being had to have created that dream world.

All of it sounded like a ridiculous story, but it didn't take long for Woo Hyo-Yeol to think in a similar direction as William.

It was the thought that the saint before him was the key to clearing this mainstream event, and that I was probably his key to becoming even stronger.

As expected, a slightly desperate Hyo-Yeol asked a good question.

"Lee Ki-Young, this is a bit of a random question, but…" Woo Hyo-Yeol paused.

"Yes?"

"What do you think…" Woo Hyo-Yeol paused again.

"…"

"What do you think I need to do to become stronger?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

When he asked that question, I was so shocked that it felt like I was struck by lightning.

'So… this is how things are connecting.'

I was kind of slow to realize it, but…

'Based on the lore, didn't I come to Rohen to help this scum?'

Based on the lore, the being inside me… was probably a set-up for Woo Hyo-Yeol's dark evolution. Actually, I think that was the case.

I was just throwing in whatever ideas that came to mind, and somehow, it all ended up forming into a story like this. I instantly made a decision.

"I… I… *ha… haha…* I can't offer a clear solution, but… right now… don't you think getting rest is the right thing to do?" I asked.

It was a slightly strange reaction, but Woo Hyo-Yeol looked at me without

thinking too much, and at this point, I couldn't help but think it was the right time to add a bit of foreshadowing.

"I'm sure you'll grow stronger, Mr. Hyo-Yeol," I mumbled with a slightly sad expression, like someone who realized something a bit too late.

"I guarantee it. I'm sure… you'll grow stronger," I added.

"…"

"…"

Flower Ki-Young was a vessel, and the power inside me that could potentially destroy the world… it was a power that I needed to transfer to Woo Hyo-Yeol. And I also added to my lore that I was a tool that could be used to suppress, purify, and refine that power.

"I'm sure of it…" I mumbled.

CHAPTER 1180
ROHEN WAS PREPARING TO RISE

“The schedule hasn’t been set yet, right?” Kathy asked.

“Yes, but I think we’ll know soon. It hasn’t been officially announced yet, but based on the supplies and the atmosphere, it’s not hard to figure it out. It’s highly likely we’ll be leaving in two weeks—no, one week at the earliest,” I[1] answered.

“This is a problem as well,” Kathy said.

“Excuse me?” I asked.

“I’m sure our commander is stressed since some are complaining that it’s too soon while others are complaining it’s not fast enough,” Kathy said.

Kathy, also known as Arhendel’s Seductress, let out a particularly loud sigh. It felt like it was only yesterday when she was filled with doubts before the Saint Bell operation and was questioning the capabilities of the Saint of Flower and Fertility.

Now, she was a devoted follower who cared for the Saint of Flower and Fertility more than anyone else.

“Don’t you agree? If they’re just going to sit back and tell us what to do, they should be in the commander’s seat. Tactics, my ass. Those primitive fools were given access to tools for civilized people, and now, they’re telling us what to do. You’d think they were the commander, not the Genius Commander,” Kathy complained.

“…”

“Am I wrong, Jonia?” Kathy asked.

“I agree,” Jonia answered.

“I’m sure they’d learn their lesson if they were all thrown out there to figure things out themselves. Even beasts understand the concept of gratitude, but those fools don’t. If it hadn’t been for the commander, Saint Bell, Arhendel, and even Rohen would have been destroyed. Don’t you agree?” Kathy asked.

“I agree,” Jonia replied.

“Except for the commander, who would know when the right time is? If he announces that we’re leaving tomorrow, there must be a reason behind it. Do you agree, Aleria?” Kathy asked.

“Yes, you’re right, Kathy. The reason they’re trying to adjust the deployment schedule is because they think the commander’s opinion is the most important,” I answered.

“*Hmm*, so… how have things been for you lately, Aleria? Have you found joy in life or something?” Kathy asked.

“What are you talking about? You—”

“Why are you playing dumb, Aleria? You were assigned to the security team, and now you can see the commander up close. Have you been checking him out every day?” Kathy questioned.

“Checking him out? Don’t say strange things like that. I didn’t volunteer for that reason,” I argued.

“It’s because I’m jealous. Why did I get denied?” Kathy complained.

It made me seriously wonder if she was asking out of pure ignorance.

‘It might be more of a character issue.’

I couldn’t figure out why they suddenly summoned the security team. There were rumors of an attempt to kidnap the commander before the Army of the

Forsaken Saint incident, but headquarters had never shared the details.

What was important to me was the fact that I applied and was accepted into the team.

There was a basic test, and I had to go through eight rounds of interviews, so it's clear how strict their standards were. They asked me things like what I did on Earth, my background in the cities I was active in, and my ideologies.

They even asked about the tiniest details. They needed security personnel to be deployed immediately, so they were running out of time to recruit people. Despite that, it was still undeniably the hardest experience of my life.

Naturally, Kathy, Arhendel's Seductress, was disqualified for many reasons.

Regardless of whether the scandals about her were true or not, her brief time in prison had to have been a massive red flag. Although it was just a minor offense of damaging an inn's property while drunk, there were many competitors, so it was inevitable that it became an issue.

"Anyway, Aleria, isn't it about time you shared some information with us? What has the commander been up to these days?" Kathy asked.

"I told you that I can't share any information, Kathy. It's the same as when you normally see him. He's not always at the command center… and you've been seeing him often lately," I answered.

"…"

"He's been spending time with his party members… and it seems like he's been spending time with the Flower and Fertility Familia, but… he's been spending time with his party members. Of course, that's excluding the time when he works," I added.

"You know that's not what I want to hear, right, Jonia?" Kathy asked.

"I agree," Jonia answered.

“Even if he’s doing other things, I can’t tell you. I wish I could tell you… but it’s top secret… and even if I did tell you…” I paused.

“…”

“He really hasn’t been doing anything else,” I continued.

“Forget it. If you didn’t want to tell me, all you had to do was say so. You’re so stingy… Let’s go, Jonia,” Kathy said.

“I don’t want to,” Jonia said.

“*Tsk.*”

As long-time friends, seeing her upset bothered me, but that was all I could tell her.

The commander’s daily routine, if anything, was boring.

Just taking care of basic tasks assigned for the day would take up most of the day. He was often up at dawn, and he was often sorting out documents. Once he was done with that, he would head out to the field to check out the soldiers’ training. He would also check the supplies every day.

He rarely had free time, but when he did, he would always spend time with his party members. Whether it was during meal times or free times, the party members would gather to talk or laugh together.

Quite a few people were already aware of that, as one could spot him all over Saint Bell.

If I had to pick out a moment where the others couldn’t see him, it would be…

“…”

“…”

It would be during a time like this.

It was a sight I would see upon returning to work, and right after parting ways with Kathy and Jonia.

The commander was staring up at the sky.

"…"

He would stand alone in silence and stare up at the sky.

It was an expression he never showed to the people closest to him.

Lately, he had been looking at the sky with a sad face. Obviously, I didn't know the reason.

What was happening to him, and what he was feeling… those were things that someone like me, a lowly soldier, could never know.

"Lee Ki-Young," Woo Hyo-Yeol called out.

"Yes, Mr. Hyo-Yeol," Lee Ki-Young answered.

"*Ah!* Hyo-Yeol oppa. You're trying to nag him again. You just worry about yourself and stop stressing out, Mr. Ki-Young. You're running the mood. Here! You should drink some as well, Dam-Hye unni," Lim Chae-Ryeong offered.

"What? Why are you suddenly—"

"It's fun, so we're all going to get drunk together!" Lim Chae-Ryeong shouted.

Whenever he was spending cheerful moments with his party members, he would smile as if he were the happiest man in the world and that the moment was extremely important to him.

Upon returning to his room at night, however, an indescribable silence would always engulf him.

"…"

It was the same the next day, the day after, and the day after that…

Perhaps it was because of Kathy and Jonia…

I wasn't trying to find things to tell them, but because of Kathy's ridiculous question, I couldn't help but look more closely at things others couldn't see, except for me.

Perhaps that was why I could take a closer look at the shadow behind the title "Saint of Flower and Fertility." It was an absurd thought… a thought that shouldn't have crossed my mind, but… he looked as if he were preparing for death.

"Mr. Ki-Young, when I suggested we eat together, I wasn't suggesting that we eat *every* meal together!" Lim Chae-Ryeong shouted.

"Was I being… bothersome?" Lee Ki-Young asked.

"Chae-Ryeong," Nam Goong-Seon mumbled.

"Unni! I obviously meant it in a good way. No! That's definitely not true! I never! Never thought you were bothersome! I mean, I'm only human, so I do need time alone from time to time, but when else will our party gather together like this?" Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

"I'm glad you think so," Lee Ki-Young said.

It was like he was trying his best to spend as much time as possible with the people he cared about.

"Mr. Hyo-Yeol, there's something I need to tell you…" Lee Ki-Young said.

"What is it? Have you thought about *that*?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"No, it's not that…" Lee Ki-Young answered.

“It’s time for me to train now. As for you… is there nothing else for you to do?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“I-I don’t really have much to do. If you could spare a moment—”

“I’m sure I told you it’s time for me to train,” Woo Hyo-Yeol interrupted him.

“*Ah*… in that case… I’ll just watch,” Lee Ki-Young said.

“*Hmph*.”

Lee Ki-Young looked as if he wanted to capture even the smallest moments of the people he cared about. He’d watch his party members train during his short break or go out of his way to spend their free time together.

Wherever his party members were, he would be there.

He sang with the party’s bard, chatted with the woman named Lim Chae-Ryeong, and talked about Woo Hyo-Yeol behind his back. During those times, he looked really, *really* happy. He would sometimes drop his always calm, dignified, and graceful demeanor by awkwardly spitting out curses that villains would say.

Then, he would open his eyes wide and smile quietly while gesticulating.

“*Hahahaha!* I didn’t know you could say something like that, Mr. Ki-Young!” Lim Chae-Ryeong laughed.

“…”

He would sometimes pray with the party’s priest, who had recently become a holy knight. He also often had debates about Rohen’s theology, and shared stories about an old warrior named Raymond Bolt. During those moments, he looked as though he was desperately swallowing his sadness.

Moreover, he often told his party members that his grandpa was still alive.

“It sounds cliche… but he lives in our hearts,” Lee Ki-Young said.

He often said that his grandpa was alive as long as he was remembered, that his grandpa would always be with them, and that he was laughing, chatting, crying, and loving the world with them. He talked about that the next day and the day after that.

In my eyes, it seemed like a silent cry, telling them not to forget about him and that he would always be with them—that he would always be laughing, chatting, crying, and loving the world with them. It was like he was desperately crying out to them.

Woo Hyo-Yeol interrupted him as if telling him to stop talking nonsense, but Lee Ki-Young was still smiling. He probably knew that was just his way of talking because I did the same. The two seemed like they would never get along, but I could tell they trusted each other. Now, I was able to smile while watching the two of them.

Around this time, he would occasionally write something.

I had no idea what he was writing, but he looked really focused.

“Commander, about the expedition plan…” I said.

“Not yet. Please wait a little longer. I’ll make sure to make an announcement,” Lee Ki-Young said.

He was constantly writing, even while working. He was still spending most of his time with his party members, but he would sometimes leave early to write. I thought perhaps he was writing about the conversations he had with his friend, a letter he wanted to write to them, or things he wanted to tell them.

He continued writing the next day, the day after that, and the day after that.

He was always looking up at the sky with sorrowful eyes, yet he would smile when gazing at his friends. He would stare at Woo Hyo-Yeol whenever the

latter was training, and he would talk to him from time to time.

He would sing songs under the starry sky with No Dam-Hye.

He would laugh like a child whenever he chatted with Lim Chae-Ryeong.

He would talk about theology with Nam Goong-Seon.

And he would honor Raymond Bolt…

He was preparing for death.

He smiled, preparing for death.

He wrote, preparing for death.

He was letting out a silent scream, as if desperately fighting back, while preparing for death.

And when he finally stopped writing…

"…"

"…"

Rohen was preparing to rise.

---

1. Aleria's POV ☜

CHAPTER 1181
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (1)

"Hurry up! What are you doing?!"

"Did you check all the supplies?"

"Hey! Bring that over here!"

"Are there any idiots who didn't get the memo that we're leaving in an hour?"

"Troops, line up! Troops, line up!"

'Now it's become a bit livelier.'

"Move it already, you slowpokes!"

The word "lively" was the best word to describe this situation.

'They should've made preparations in advance.'

A few days ago, they were told to make preparations so that we could leave at any moment…

'Maybe they thought they prepared everything based on their standards.'

Now that they were in this situation, it seemed that there were many things they had to check beforehand. It was understandable, though.

The Demon King of Sunset's Castle raid was an expedition of unprecedented scale on Rohen, so no one had any experience.

The people from headquarters, who had been put in their current positions because they seemed competent, were panicking as if they were

experiencing the Great Depression.

“The vanguards will be leaving soon.”

“What about the main force? Are they leaving right on schedule?”

“Yes, they’ll be leaving as planned.”

“Damn it, what about delaying the expedition…”

‘You guys are saying that for me to hear, right?’

“No one has agreed to it.”

“*Whoo…* What are you guys doing?! Move it, move it!”

‘I miss Miss Kim Mi-Young.’

To be exact, I was missing the team that she had created, but it was her responsibility to give the final approval and determine the tasks.

Obviously, the expedition preparations weren’t always perfect on our continent, but I couldn’t remember experiencing something like this.

They were moving pieces of luggage on the large carriage; there were shouts and screams everywhere. This had been happening since last night, so I was sure the supply squadron hadn’t slept at all.

‘I won’t complain about being slow, so just make sure everything is there. Be thorough, please.’

While I was staring at the people preparing for the expedition, I felt someone’s presence beside me.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young.”

It was a quiet but deep voice. The speaker was obvious.

"*Ah!* Mr. William! It feels like it's been a while since we met," I greeted.

"Yes, it has been a while. Have you been…" William asked.

"I've been spending a lot of time with the party members. Talking to each other like this feels new yet strange. I'm sorry, I've just been—"

"*Haha*… it's fine. You don't need to apologize. I'm sure you were happy to see your party members for the first time in a while…" William interrupted me.

"Was I too oblivious?" I asked.

"…"

I was acting a bit oblivious. Of course, it wasn't *that* serious, but I was sure there were people who would find this problematic because the situation was tenser than ever.

Rohen was about to go on an expedition, and my actions weren't fitting as the commander-in-chief of the Demon King's Castle expedition. I was sure many people glanced at me, and William obviously heard what people were saying.

"Singing or chattering loudly are actions I shouldn't be showing in front of the troops… People have been complaining about it, right?" I asked.

"I'm sure…" William paused.

"Yes?"

"No one will criticize you, Mr. Ki-Young," William continued.

"…"

"You've sacrificed so much already," William added.

'Yeah… that's true.'

“Are you afraid of… losing your comrades, I mean, friends?” William asked.

“…”

“…”

“Something like that. Words aren’t enough to describe how dangerous this expedition is going to be. I don’t know how this story will end… but I’m sure many will die and many will survive. Just like my grandfather… I mean, Mr. Raymond Bolt,” I answered.

“…”

“I… I thought I could calmly say goodbye, stand up like I did before, and that if he were in my heart, he wouldn’t disappear, but…” I paused.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young…”

“It’s not just the death of others. It’s something I’ve always thought of while experiencing many deaths with you, Mr. William. I thought I wouldn’t be afraid of death anymore, that I would be okay if my meaningless life just disappeared for Rohen and the people I love, but I must’ve been a bigger… coward than I thought,” I explained.

“…”

“It’s sad and heartbreaking… to know that you might not be able to spend time with the people I cherish anymore…” I added.

“Why… why do you think that way? The things you’re imagining won’t happen. If someone tries to harm you—”

I had a feeling that this conversation was going to last long, so I had to end it quickly.

“Thank you for comforting me,” I said before clearly expressing that I no longer wanted to talk about it.

William remained quiet and stepped backward. I made a slightly sad face, and then I smiled brightly as if I were fine. It was like my sadness just now was a lie.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young…” William said.

“Shall… we get going?” I asked.

“There’s something… I need to tell you…” William said.

“It’s been quite some time since the scouts and vanguards left, so we won’t be that late if we head out now,” I suggested.

“Right.”

“I’ll skip the departure ceremony. The key is how safely and quickly we can pass through the Ashen Sunset Region, so Mr. William, please take extra care in managing the troops,” I ordered.

“Yes… sir,” William mumbled.

William looked dissatisfied. He looked like he was telling me that he was going to back off for now, but unfortunately, there wouldn’t be another chance to have a deep conversation like this.

‘I’m going to avoid it.’

As the twenty-three-year-old Flower Ki-Young, I understood my role.

The preparations were complete, and the timing was great, so…

“We’re leaving,” I announced.

“We’re leaving!”

‘Right?’

‘We’ve gotten a little closer, right, Hyo-Yeol?’

The time we had spent together was going to be all worth it.

"*Huh?* Are you coming with us as well?" Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

"I intentionally asked to be moved to a different unit because I wanted to be with you guys on our way there…" I answered.

"Man, you must really like us, *hehe*…" Lim Chae-Ryeong giggled.

"*Hmph.*"

'We did get closer, right?'

It was difficult to make an accurate diagnosis since he rarely expressed himself, but it was an undeniable fact that we had gotten a lot closer compared to before.

The time I spent stuck in a sweat-smelling training ground wasn't an illusion.

'Look, he looks like he's secretly waiting for me to talk to him.'

"You really must have nothing to do," Woo Hyo-Yeol grumbled.

'He… talked to me first.'

"Only until something happens…" I said.

"Is it okay for you to be here?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"You don't have to worry since I don't have a lot to do. We have a lot of troops, so the minor tasks are all being divided among them. I also don't have a lot of time to come out and walk around like this.

"Normally, I'd be spending time in the situation room inside the carriage," I answered.

"…"

“I wouldn’t really be outside like this unless it’s my break time or unless it’s necessary, like I have to build my tent,” I added.

Nam Goong-Seon joined the conversation, saying, “What about now…”

“We still haven’t entered the Ashen Sunset Region,” I replied.

“Hey, you.”

“Yes?”

“Aren’t you too relaxed right now?” Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

“Why are you picking on him again all of a sudden? Don’t worry, Mr. Ki-Young. He must’ve woken up on the wrong side of the bed this morning. He’s nice at first and then starts acting mean sometimes,” Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

“Shut up, kid. I’m not wrong. It’s okay to fool around before leaving for the expedition, but we’re at war right now. I can’t understand your actions,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

‘He’s trying to stack his karma.’

“We’re not on a camping trip. We’re here to raid a well-known dungeon and take down the enemy whose identity is unknown. All I’m saying is that you should take this a little more seriously. If laughing and talking is your way of comforting yourself, then there’s nothing I can do… but you’re not hostile enough,” Woo Hyo-Yeol explained.

“But…”

“That’s all I wanted to say,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

‘He’s being a little sensitive.’

I wasn’t sure if he disliked this kind of atmosphere or if he was simply taking out his anger, but I noticed that Hyo-Yeol was more sensitive than usual.

It was probably because he knew the importance of this expedition.

It was Rohen's first mainstream expedition, and this was necessary for the demon lord to turn Hyo-Yeol into a regressor. This situation would stress out even the most insensitive person, so I understood his reaction, but what if…

'What if he's worried about losing his comrades?'

I was really hoping that those motions were hidden in his subconscious. I really hoped that he was unknowingly affected by Raymond Bolt's death, and he liked his comrades more than he thought.

Lim Chae-Ryeong was always grumbling, Nam Goong-Seon was supporting the party quietly, and No Dam-Hye probably had a connection with him in his first life. Then, there was me—the man who appeared in his life one day.

I hoped his subconscious, which considered those people as his family, was worried about them dying during this expedition, and that anxiety was what led to this situation.

'I have a feeling that's the case.'

'We've become really close, and it's about time you start liking me. You're being sensitive because you're worried that the expedition might lead to the worst possible situation, right? Right?'

Of course, I wasn't going to be understanding of him just yet. I was pretending to be mature, objective, and understanding of everything, but I was also an ignorant young man.

I was anxious as well, and I was probably more anxious than he was.

"You… don't know…" I mumbled…

"What?"

"You don't even know how I feel by being here," I said.

Glaring at him with resentment was a natural thing to do…

“What did you say?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

‘It’s the perfect timing.’

Their connection was already on the right path, and the actors were heading to the stage. Also, no writer would deny the fact that, when it came to tragedies like this, it was more entertaining when people became a bit distant in the middle of it.

I tried to suppress the disappointment rising inside me…

“Lee Ki-Young, you…”

And I immediately headed to the carriage.

Obviously, Jung Ha-Yan followed me immediately, and the expedition group finally started moving toward the Ashen Sunset.

It was going pretty smoothly as well. Although “strong winds” and “high waves” occasionally blocked our path, the expedition members definitely knew that these endless trials would bring them a brighter tomorrow, and it was proven by how no one stopped marching.

‘We’re just walking on an open road though… ‘

Seeing Hyo-Yeol looking around the carriage anxiously from time to time was great.

After some time, he looked as if he was waiting for me to exit the carriage, but it was better not to say anything until something happened.

And then…

“…”

We finally reached the Demon King of Sunset's Castle…

'You're not even going to give them a chance to correct their mistake. You obviously won't accept their apology, and you're just going to leave the misunderstandings and the conflicts as is,' I told myself.

Right after I got off the carriage, the first thing I noticed was Woo Hyo-Yeol standing nearby, but… I ignored him… and I had to have hurt his pride because he frowned and ignored me as well.

He was a brat.

[Mainstream Event: Monarch of Sunset's Second Story[1]—the Demon King of Sunset's Castle has started.]

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1. Yes, the author wrote second story ☜

CHAPTER 1182
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (2)

[Mainstream Event: Monarch of Sunset's Second Story—the Demon King of Sunset's Castle has started.]

The troops remained quiet upon hearing the message.

Unlike the time against the Forsaken Saint, they didn't get a positive, uplifting energy from that message. It was understandable, as the Demon King's Castle was giving off such an overwhelming and oppressive air.

'It's well made.'

I had no idea who made it, but the Demon King of Sunset's Castle felt like an actual dungeon. It had an antique design, and the scale and size of the dungeon were pretty overwhelming. Its scenery blended with the Ashen Sunset, and if I were to exaggerate a bit, I'd say the entrance looked like it was welcoming its guests to hell.

'Actually, it's more like they remodeled the castle. Didn't they say that it was originally some king's castle?'

It was natural for some people, including Marybell, the fifth princess and the survivor of this kingdom, to be upset. Perhaps she thought the demons had damaged the pride of the royal family.

I also saw a sense of duty and responsibility in her eyes.

Overall, everyone looked nervous. They were all probably thinking the same thing. They didn't want to enter the castle, and if I had come here without knowing anything, I would have withdrawn the troops.

"What should we do, Mr. Lee Ki-Young? Should we make a safe zone…"

“No, I think we should enter right away before we get surrounded by the demons of the 21st Legion. We worked hard to get here after shaking off the pursuers, and I don’t want to let that go to waste,” I answered.

“I see.”

“We’ll create the safe zone inside the Demon King’s Castle,” I added.

The path that Kim Ye-Ri and the members of the Blue Guild had made was really helpful to us, but publicly, it was a surprise attack on the enemy.

The demons probably hadn’t expected all of us to enter the Demon King of Sunset’s Castle. The command center probably thought that I was showing off my abilities as the Genius Commander, but we couldn’t delay any longer.

‘It’s not like we didn’t get into any battles before coming here.’

We intentionally avoided battles.

The demons were actually maintaining the defensive line of the Ashen Sunset Region. The Blue Guild said that they would open a path, but the 21st Legion actually belonged to Kim Hyun-Sung, and not the Blue Guild.

They had to have witnessed their master getting beaten to death in real-time, so if they didn’t want to get purged, they had to stop us with everything they had. This applied to the demons protecting the outer walls of the castle, and they were trying to stop us from entering.

Unfortunately for them, we had a way to counter that.

“A large army like this cannot stay there forever, so…” I paused.

“Yes?”

“Can I ask you to lead the way, Miss Marybell?” I requested.

“I honestly don’t remember it well. Escaping the castle through the sewers

was something I did often when I was young… and when I matured, I lived in the Central Imperial Academy… I know I confidently said I knew this place, but…" Marybell paused.

'Now that you're here, you're not confident anymore?'

"It's fine. It's enough for you to tell me that the path leads to Melbourne Village. The reconnaissance team will probably investigate the area first based on what you told me beforehand," I said.

"I see." She nodded and bit her lips with a determined face.

Honestly, it didn't really matter if the fifth princess of a fallen kingdom didn't know the way very well because the blueprint of the Demon King's Castle that I got from Kim Ye-Ri in advance was already in my head.

The only reason the princess was here was so that I could answer questions when asked about how I knew the way.

Obviously, I started walking immediately. Walking through the entrance didn't seem like such a bad idea, but there was no need to force a siege and tear down the door. The former seemed more dramatic, but fighting the demons who were terrified of getting purged would inflict too much damage on us.

"There are a total of three entrances to the sewer, right, Miss Maybell?" I asked.

"What? *Ah*… yes, I think so," Maybell answered.

"Like you said, the first and second entrance is connected to the underground waterway in Melbourne Village, and the last one leads to the Pedlington River. Isn't that right, Miss Maybell?" I asked.

"*Ahh*, yes! I… I think so," Maybell answered.

"I think it's best if we split the troops into three groups. The first entrance,

which is the largest, will be investigated by my party and me, and the remaining two will be investigated by the groups I mentioned earlier. I'll be constantly watching you using the long-distance communication spell, so if you find anything unusual, please report it to me right away," I instructed.

"Yes, sir."

"Understood."

Jung Ha-Yan, who had Anemone's Eye, was obviously going to go with me, but unfortunately, I couldn't take Han Sora of Ahrendel.

The first party included me, Jung Ha-Yan, and our other party members; the second party included the heroes of Ahrendel and Han Sora; and the third party included Woo Hyo-Hyeol and the high-ranking officers of Rohen.

I looked around and saw Hyo-Yeol leaving without saying a word to me. When I saw Lim Chae-Ryeong, Nam Goong-Seon, and No Dam-Hye, I walked over to them and greeted them.

The parties had a separate communication network, and after passing through the underground waterway, we would meet at the castle, so it was going to be a short farewell.

"Okay, let's go," I said.

Stealthily and quickly…

"Five, four."

Quickly…

"Three, two, one," I said.

"…"

"The spell."

“Shadow of Concealment.”

Multiple mages cast the same spell at once. The invisibility spell on the entire army was promptly refreshed, and the operation finally began.

The mages and the priests cast another spell.

The Perception Reduction spell and the Speed Boost spell on me stacked up. My body felt light as a feather. The people, whose Agility was boosted, were moving so fast that they couldn’t quite get used to it.

Of course, the buff didn’t last long.

We didn’t have a saint-level priest who could cast a buff on the entire army by themselves, so this method wasn’t that effective.

I was sure many mages would complain about not having enough mana after entering the Demon King’s Castle, but there was no other way.

All I did was take one step, but it felt like I moved two to three steps, and the vanguards were way ahead of us.

It was pretty spectacular to see over one thousand troops moving in formation in a single file line. Emilia standing next to me raised two of her fingers not long after we started moving.

‘Did she place the troops in place?’

I raised one finger, and I saw her nodding.

I immediately saw the results.

I saw low-ranking demons being killed at the underground waterway entrance.

‘The vanguard has already entered the waterway.’

The enemy's force was small, and I couldn't help but think that Kim Ye-Ri was being considerate of me. The second party and the third party entered the underground waterway around the same time.

The disgusting smell of the sewage stung my nose so badly that I couldn't breathe, but I couldn't show it.

'Shit.'

It smelled so bad that I couldn't help but think perhaps we could have just started a siege and entered the castle that way.

"Please remove the invisibility spell," I ordered.

"Yes, sir."

"Same thing for the second and third party. Save your mana. The reserve will secure an escape route, and the remaining troops will head inside," I instructed.

"Yes, sir."

— Understood.

— Yes, Commander.

— Party Two will start the battle. It looks like a demon influenced by the Ashen Sunset.

"Good luck," I said.

'That won't be a problem, so it's better for us.'

The third party continued without any issues. I would have to wait and see what would happen next, but our plan to enter the castle seemed like a success.

After removing the spell, I saw William taking care of his unit.

After checking the mages' mana and stamina, he immediately called for the reconnaissance team and ordered them to search the area. He had to have thought that I had too many responsibilities, as he was trying to do things he could do on his own.

'Nice, nice. That's how people should act. You have to have the ability to learn.'

"Miss Marybell, how much longer until the Demon King's Castle?" I asked.

"I think we just need to walk for about thirty minutes. We can move faster, as there aren't that many demons here… from what I saw earlier…" Marybell answered.

I was walking while having necessary conversations with Marybell, and eventually, I saw a large clearing.

I knew the first underground waterway was the largest, but I was still taken aback by the size of this place.

It was big enough to accommodate all the troops, so if I were this dungeon's designer, I would place a gatekeeper here.

Kim Ye-Ri and the members of the Blue Guild had visited so many dungeons to the point that they were tired of it, so I was sure this atmosphere was familiar to them.

"Looks like foolish guests arrived."

I heard a voice from far away, and I recognized it instantly.

"*Hmph…* You don't know your place by entering… the D-Demon's Castle… You're so foolish."

There was a small problem; the voice sounded like she was reading a textbook. The way she talked sounded stiff, as if she were wearing clothes

that didn't fit her. Actually, she was wearing clothes that didn't suit her at all.

'Ah… who put her here?'

She was one of the youngest members of the Blue Guild…

'Why did they put her here?'

It was Alps.

'Ah, Kim Ye-Ri. Seriously! She shouldn't have done anything. Why did she prepare so many things?'

I was more confused than happy. I couldn't help but feel confused. I was at a loss for words when I saw her outfit. I never imagined I'd see her wearing a bikini-style armor. Whenever she wore armor, Alps would always wear a puffy beige-colored robe.

From the start, she was a simple country girl. Even after joining the Blue Guild, she maintained that innocence, and she had a lot of fans who loved her for that. The helmet, which covered her usually well-groomed hair, had horns attached to it, and there were even horns attached to the bikini armor.

I had no idea why, but she was holding a whip.

Alps emerged slowly from the darkness, and her outfit, which reminded me of female protagonists from the 90s, seemed to be making her feel embarrassed, as she had her head down.

To make matters worse, her face betrayed her delight upon seeing Jung Ha-Yan and me.

'Don't greet us, damn it. Don't greet us… '

Alps was about to bow toward us, but she had to have recalled her role in time, as she quickly fixed her posture.

However, her behavior was pretty strange.

'Just don't say anything. I beg you.'

"*Hmm… mmm~*" Alps hummed.

'Don't hum, and please stop that sexy female officer concept.'

"It seems that… many mortals… have come to be t-trained by me," Alps stuttered.

'Why are you stuttering? What's with that concept? Stop hitting the ground with the whip.'

Crack!

Crack!!!

Crack!!!

That sound annoyed me so much that I found it unbearable.

To make things worse, the way she was swinging that whip looked really awkward.

'Where's Shiro?'

It probably wasn't Shiro, but I saw three giant demons behind her.

I finally understood her concept and role, but it didn't mean that I could forgive her. What saved Alps was certainly not her poor acting skills or her bikini armor—it was the three demons under her control.

"*Grrr…*"

"*Kergh…*"

The beasts from hell were drooling while growling at us. If only Alps weren't

swinging her whip while blushing, this would be a pretty convincing scene.

'Why is she wearing a cape with that armor? Since she's controlling the beasts, does she need a whip? And since she's using a whip, why did you give her the traits of a queen? Are you the one who came up with this, Ye-Ri?'

"*Hmmm*~ nothing more needs to be said," Alps said.

No one asked her anything, so I didn't know why she said that.

I wanted to run out of the dungeon because I was so embarrassed.

"Now, let's go straight to the point~ I, the tamer of beasts, will be your opponent! You foolish mortals!" Alps yelled.

[You have encountered the first boss of the Demon King of Sunset's Castle.]

[The Beast Tamer, Alps.]

The three giant beasts charged at the troops.

CHAPTER 1183
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (3)

[You have encountered the first boss of the Demon King of Sunset's Castle.]

[The Beast Tamer, Alps.]

This was wrong, and I would end up going crazy if I kept watching this.

'Maybe not telling Kim Ye-Ri anything was the answer.'

The answer to the question of whether her original, charismatic appearance was better or not could be found by simply looking at Doom Hee-Young.

I was sure she went through the process of awakening as a demon, but Beast Tamer Alps definitely didn't look like that from the very beginning.

Director Kim Ye-Ri probably thought that the people of Rohen needed experience points to fight against the fake Kim Hyun-Sung, and the result we were seeing now was what Director Kim Ye-Ri came up with after thinking over the most efficient way to give us experience points.

It wouldn't be so bad if Alps weren't wearing that hideous bikini armor. I knew I had to focus, but I obviously couldn't do that. H-her appearance and every action bothered me.

Crack!

"*Hmm~*" Alps hummed.

Crack!

"I-If someone asked you how you arrived in hell, tell them that Beast Tamer Alps sent you!" Alps stuttered.

Once the audience noticed how embarrassed and awkward the actors were, they would want to run out as well.

'I can't believe she wasted such a good concept… '

I had no idea that Alps would appear as the first boss, but I definitely never imagined that she would appear as a beast tamer. Depending on the director, that title could be a hit or a miss, and Miss Kim Ye-Ri—the creator of the Dance of Enchantment—had successfully thrown that title into the trash.

'Maybe she's not the only one behind this.'

This could be the work of the Park-Ki-Ri siblings. Battle Mage and Bloodthirsty Berserker were their creations. Had they ultimately brought Alps down to their level?

One good thing was that the expedition group didn't seem to think that this situation was strange. They were focused more on the giant beasts before them rather than the girl who was talking awkwardly, so that was good.

"Prepare for battle! Prepare for battle!"

"*Roooooooooooar!*"

"Hold up your shields!"

"*Krrrrrrgh!*"

With a loud cry, the beasts charged at us.

Crack!

When the bear-like beast heard Alps' whip, it swung its large forepaw at us.

'So that's the signal.'

The giant bear either moved to the side or swung its forepaw, following

Alps's command, who was hitting the ground with her whip.

'The first beast doesn't seem that difficult.'

It looked like a typical vanguard-type beast.

The giant bear drew the focus away from the other beasts and blocked us with its thick hide and armor.

Several allied tanks were keeping the beast in place while mages unleashed their spells, but it wasn't enough to pierce through the bear's hide. The enhanced hide was probably designed so that only players specializing in offense could pierce it.

The second beast was a giant lizard.

Crack!

It kept spitting out poison from afar, so it was obviously a ranged-type damage dealer.

The strange part was that a green residue remained in the spots where the poison landed. The residue made a *sizzling* sound, and it was obviously harmful to ordinary humans. It looked like it was used to limit the allied troops' movements during the battle.

The priests' purification spells could purify it, but erasing them all wasn't the answer.

'They could use up all their holy power just trying to get rid of those.'

They had already consumed a ton of holy power and mana before we got here, so they could probably purify the ground two or three times.

The third beast was a dog with three heads. It was a typical melee damage dealer, but one head spat fire, the other spat ice, while the other spat lightning bolts. It was such a cliched beast that I didn't even need to explain

it.

The beasts were well designed. The bear emitted a foul, decaying odor, and the lizard had strange, abnormal bumps all over its body. They were subtly altered to the point that they looked like beasts that would exist in hell.

Features such as the size of their claws, fangs, eyes, and fur were subtly altered.

However, they had notable features like the bear, which had four eyes.

'They made them better than I thought… '

The only thing that wasn't great was the Beast Tamer herself.

Crack!

Kaboom!

"It's coming! Shield! Shield!" someone shouted upon noticing the ball of poison that the lizard spat at them.

Right before the green ball could hit the troops, a transparent barrier enveloped them.

Just then, the bear swung its paw. With a *clank*, the shield cracked. The three-headed dog slipped through the gap using its petite figure and ruined our formation.

It barked furiously, and the screams of the troops accompanied its barking.

"Tanks, what are you doing?! Get aggro! Aggro!"

"Damn it! You stupid bear!"

Whoosh!

"Shield! Shiiield!"

“Damn it! Over here!”

‘These idiots can’t get it together.’

It seems like Alps was doing a good job figuring out their weakness, but… our setup was still good.

I thought their patterns were a bit complicated for Rohen.

The ground was already covered in green, making it hard for them to find places they could step on, and they needed to block ranged attacks with their shield, but the bear kept breaking their shields.

They couldn’t move forward because there was a tank holding its ground, and the dog broke our formation nonstop, wearing down our troops with its special powers.

“*Hohohoho… Hohoho!*” Alps laughed.

‘Stop laughing.’

“*Hohohoho! Cough!* M-My lovely beasts will be having a feast… today! *Cough! Cough!*” she shouted as she coughed.

‘Stop coughing.’

It was an unexpected battle, and since things were so disorganized, I thought it was natural for them to be confused for a second, but they were more unstable than I expected.

‘But it shouldn’t be to the point that they’re getting beaten up like this… ‘

Since she was the first boss, she was designed to be an easy opponent.

Crack! Crack!

The sound of the whip hitting the ground was the signal, and if they figured

out the pattern, they could easily figure out the enemy's movements and timing.

It was a simple mechanic, but sadly, no one here thought about focusing on the sound of the whip. They seemed more focused on blocking and dodging the enemy's attack; they weren't thinking about defeating the boss at all.

"Weak! You're too weak! I-I can't believe… you came all the way to the Demon King of Sunset's Castle when you're so weak! You're so foolishly brave that you can't tell the difference between courage and recklessness! *Hohohoho… heh…* Y-You dumb… pigs!" Alps yelled.

Crack!

"I-I can't wait to see… how you'll get through this!" Alps added.

Crack!

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young… this is…" William said.

'Yeah, I won't help them with this.'

"*Haa… haa…*"

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young?" William said.

"I-I'm sorry, Mr. William… M-My head… suddenly feels… strange. It suddenly…" I paused.

"Damn it…" William mumbled.

"I feel like my head is going to split open," I continued.

"It's fine. I'm sure it'll get better. Please wait here," William said.

'Yeah, I feel like I shouldn't help out with this, and it wasn't because I didn't want to join them on stage.'

'If I help, you guys won't level up.'

Naturally, this was all to make the people of Rohen grow even stronger. The reason Alps was immersed in her role, despite blushing in humiliation, was all for the sake of Rohen's growth.

If I were to tell them what to do, it'd be easy to defeat the boss, but that would be meaningless. The mechanics of the named Beast Tamer, Alps, was structured in a way that once one realized that the sound of the whip hitting the ground was a hint, one would naturally figure out the fight…

'They just need to learn the hard way.'

Moreover, there was more than one way to clear this dungeon. The bear with the tough hide wasn't stepping on the poison puddles created by the lizard, and even the dog was careful not to spit fire on the contaminated ground.

'They can take down the bear using the poison and burn the contaminated ground using fire.'

It was obviously impossible to burn them all, as it could turn this place into a sea of flames. If the troops moved to one side and got back into formation after burning the poison away, they would have more room to work with.

They could create a separate unit to take care of the dog and keep it under control. If they burned the poison using fire, used ice to create a bridge for the players, and paralyzed the bear, they would be able to finish this battle.

It seemed like the three beasts were working closely together, but they were each other's weaknesses. Of course, knowing how to defeat them and executing the plan was a completely different issue, but…

'You guys need to figure this out on your own.'

Cramming information into them was bad as well. They had to know how to think for themselves. If they couldn't figure it out, then they had to learn the hard way.

It definitely wasn't because I didn't want to join them on stage.

"Damn it! Stop shaking! We're going to fall!"

"*Ahhhhhhhh!*"

"Stop the dog first! The dog!"

"*Mmm~*" Alps hummed.

"Shield! Shield!"

Crack!

'She's even giving you guys hints. That dog was the problem in the first place.'

In order for the troops to maintain formation, they had to take care of the dog before anything else. Once they had taken care of the dog, they would naturally figure out how to take care of the other two.

"Emilia," William said.

"Yes?"

"The Flower and Fertility Familia will take care of the dog," William instructed.

"Understood," Emilia said.

'That's it.'

"The most important thing right now is for our troops to reorganize their formation," William added.

"Got it."

I saw the Flower and Fertility Familia charging at the three-headed dog. With a *boom!* the familia's mages and archers unleashed long-ranged attacks on it,

and the other troops made a path at the news that the familia was making their move.

I saw William cornering the dog.

Crack!

“Stop the bear from coming closer! Stop it!!!”

“Keep your shields up! Create as much space as possible so the Flower and Fertility Familia can move easily!”

‘They’ve got great instincts.’

It looked like they still had no idea what they were doing… but it seemed like they were finally figuring out the puzzle.

“The contaminated area seems to be reacting to the dog’s fire, William.”

“Okay, let’s corner it,” William ordered.

Around a hundred people were already incapacitated, so I’d say they were pretty slow, but they had the potential…

I nodded to myself.

Just then, a voice came through the receiver.

— Party Two has encountered Belier, the Gladiator of the Underground Arena!

And.

— Reporting in! Party Three has encountered Smith, the Black Butler.

“…”

“…”

‘Colonel Smith is the newest member, but he’s an experienced veteran… ‘

— Requesting reinforcements! Requesting reinforcements! *Ack!*

‘Why would you place him at the beginning of the dungeon? Have you guys forgotten his experience?’

“…”

“…”

‘And what kind of butler is holed up in an underground passageway?’

The design was clearly flawed.

CHAPTER 1184
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (4)

At the very least, Kim Ye-Ri wasn't supposed to introduce Black Butler Smith right after entering the castle. And a butler waiting for his enemies in an underground passageway? It was so ridiculous that I was at a loss for words.

'Or maybe she could have called him something else other than a butler.'

He had a butler-like aura, but even if that was the case, there was a line to be drawn. Actually, if I were to talk about the mistakes she had made, including him in the list of named beings who would appear at the very beginning was one of the mistakes.

'Is this really okay?'

I wasn't worried about Belier, the Gladiator of the Underground Arena.

The mechanic assigned to her made her seem like a named being who specialized in close combat, and it felt like she was clearly designed to be at a disadvantage against Han Sora.

Of course, the biggest reason was that Belier's potential was lower than the others. She was wearing a strange armor, so I couldn't make out her silhouette, but seeing her raise her fist instead of a weapon was unmistakably Belier.

With one arm stretched out to measure the distance between herself and her opponent, she pressed her other hand to her chest, ready to do hand signs.

Her habits and strides confirmed that she was Belier.

Surprisingly, the enormous armor shrouding her appeared to be some sort of tool to seal Gladiator Belier's power. Her armor became more dilapidated

with each attack, and the battle became progressively more challenging as well.

It was obvious that her second phase would start once her armor was completely destroyed.

— *Hohohoho!* Who will be the ten-thousandth sacrifice?!

'Is that kind of laugh typical for the female high-ranking members in the Demon King's Castle?'

What made her better than Alps, who was in front of me, was that she wasn't nearly as awkward as Alps. Unexpectedly, it looked like she was born for this, and I saw her skillfully handle Party Two while carrying out the plan.

— Hey! You there! This is a duel!

Walls were raised, blocking all the troops except for the ones at the end of Belier's finger. As a gladiator, she was capable of creating her own arena and taking on the enemies she had singled out.

Assuming her stats had increased after receiving power from the 21st Legion, this mechanic was perfect for her, as she never had a fight of this scale until now.

'The problem was… '

Why was she beating them so ruthlessly?

The guys who were dragged to the arena with her were getting up beaten hard.

— *Hap!*

One punch was enough to send a priest flying into a wall. It looked like every bone in their body had shattered, so I couldn't believe that they were still alive. Her armor was large and heavy, providing her with excellent defense.

It allowed her to ignore most attacks while bulldozing through and beating them up.

— This feeling! This is it!

'It doesn't look like she's acting.'

It surprisingly looked tricky to defeat her, but the keyword was look.

Amidst the screams and chaos, Han Sora was quietly watching the situation.

The moment she entered the arena, things would start falling into place.

I looked at Party Two again but found no major issues. The second boss' pattern looked kind of complicated, but it wasn't complicated enough that it could be called a variable, so there was no need for me to keep a close eye on them.

The real issue was Black Butler Smith.

— *Aaaah!!*

— Dodge! Dodge! They're magic bullets!

— Damn it…

— Take cover! Mages, do something, damn it!

— Shit! There's a seriously wounded person here! We have someone who's heavily wounded, damn it!

Bang! Bang, bang!

Once the thick smoke cleared up, Colonel Smith—no, Black Butler Smith's figure was revealed. His dashing mustache, symbolizing his butler role, was just as impressive as ever.

The only difference was that he had two horns on his forehead. They didn't

look hideous. Instead, they looked like he had them from the start. It seemed like he wanted to maintain his concept as a butler because he was wearing small glasses, which was unlike him.

Despite that, his restrained movements remained unchanged.

'He still looks stiff.'

His posture was perfectly straight and unwavering. The sight of him with his hands behind his back was the very image of a butler, but unfortunately, they were standing inside a foul-smelling underground sewer.

He seemed like nothing more, nothing less than a villain in a suit, hanging out in the sewer. The situation felt as strange as encountering an arctic fox in a desert, but the mismatch in location had nothing to do with his strength.

'They can't do anything.'

As ridiculous as it sounded, Party Three was completely missing from the path heading toward the sewer. They were all hiding behind a cover or slipping away to places where Butler Smith couldn't find them.

— *Pant... pant...*

—…

— Damn it… damn it… *Ahhhhhhhhhhh!* Ho-Young!

Just then, one of them revealed himself, trying to rescue a fallen comrade on the ground. With a *boom!* I saw a hole in his body. Butler Smith's way of fighting was the same as before—launching magic bullets from his fingertips.

'Why is he so fast?'

The only difference was that his attacks were a lot faster than before.

I was sure that not even the allied forces knew when he fired his shots, as Black Butler Smith was still standing with his hand behind his back and observing the situation calmly.

They would die if they showed themselves…

I was sure the players there all had that same thought.

— Beyond this point lies the Demon King of Sunset's Castle.

— *Haa… haa…*

— Those without an invitation are not permitted to enter. I kindly ask that you show respect and leave at once.

Perhaps it was because of his emotionless, cold voice, but it gave off the sense that his emotions were perfectly in balance.

It was as if Colonel Smith had found a role that required no acting skill at all.

Each time he delivered a line, his mustache would twitch, making it obvious that he was experiencing some form of humiliation.

I felt like the fact that his role was insignificant due to his concept was the only silver lining here.

There was no particular mechanic or anything special about him. Black Butler Smith's purpose and role were to filter out the worthy from the unworthy. Whether one could defeat him, the butler of the Sunset Castle, or not, was the real test of this named being.

'Someone will be able to defeat him, right?'

— Damn it… damn it…

Using sheer numbers to overwhelm him didn't sound like a bad idea, but the damage would be too great.

To put it bluntly, it was like charging at an enemy with a machine gun inside a narrow alley with nothing but a knife in hand. Regardless of whether ten or a hundred people charged at him, the result would be the same.

Unless the corpses became walls and shields, they wouldn't be able to break through.

That was the reason why they were hiding…

— The tanks must take the lead. Hold up your shields and charge as fast as possible. I want the priests to prepare a recovery spell and the mages to cast a shield.

— Can we really take him on?

— It's not about whether we can take him on or not. The important thing is that we try something. Are you planning on staying here all day? *Whoo… whoo… whoo…* Let's go. Actually, I'll go first. Support me immediately.

— Understood.

— Shield unit, go!

"Your struggle is meaningless."

The shield unit, armored with every buff available, charged out, but they became pincushions in mere seconds.

— *Gaaaaaah!*

A bootleg Park Deok-Gu attempted to take a step forward behind the guy who coughed up blood, but he was blasted away before he could even take a step forward.

The archers hiding behind the shield unit, the mages trying to provide support by casting shields, and the priests trying to use their recovery magic on the wounded were falling apart as holes appeared in them.

— *Ahhhh!*

— Damn it! I need a priest!

— *Ah!*

— Move forward! Move forward, you idiots!

— *Cough. Cough… blech…*

— Aaaargh*!*

It was a horrific outcome caused by the leader's flaw in their plan.

'Is this Operation Overlord or something?'

— Keep going! Keep going!

'Go where? You guys only took a few steps forward.'

— Keep moving forward! Hold up your shields! Shit! Shield! Shield!

Clank! Clank! Bang!

Bang! Boom! Boom!

Black Butler Smith raised both of his hands and fired his magic bullets.

The smoke grew thicker and thicker as he fired.

Bang! Crack! Bang!

— *Ahhhhhhhh!*

— Attack! Attack! Move!

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Craaack! Bang! Bang!

'Does Colonel Smith not know the meaning of doing things in moderation?'

— *Ugh… ack…* S-Save me…

— *Yaaaaaaaaaaah!* Die, you dirty demon!

— Get the injured to safety and move back!

— Shit! What the hell is this?! What the hell?!

In an instant, an overwhelming number of soldiers became incapacitated.

Just then, Black Butler Smith's stance wavered amidst his barrage.

'Hyo-Yeol.'

A black beast with its claws hidden had charged forward. He was moving while crouched and was dodging invisible bullets. He used a tank covered in blood as a shield as he moved forward and dodged the bullets by sticking to the wall.

Bang! Bang! Baaang!

He advanced, using two swords to deflect the bullets. In addition, protection-type spells engulfed him.

"Melody of Protection!"

A background music was played, and sound waves engulfed him.

A loud *bang* echoed, and Woo Hyo-Yeol's head snapped back.

'Shit! Hyo-Yeol!'

Woo Hyo-Yeol looked forward again, and I saw a bullet between his teeth.

'I feel like I've seen this scene somewhere before! Shit!'

- *Pft!* You're not so tough.

Black Butler Smith's eyes widened a bit in surprise.

Realizing that he needed to say something, he muttered, "Oh ho…"

Despite catching the bullet between his teeth, Woo Hyo-Yeol still looked a bit pitiful.

'Woo Hyo-Yeol… definitely has good instincts.'

Perhaps he had stayed back until now because he was trying to get used to those bullets. After assessing the power of those bullets and whether he could dodge them or not, Woo Hyo-Yeol made a move, and his movements became smoother as time went on.

When Woo Hyo-Yeol took another step forward, Black Butler Smith raised his hands and said, "You pass."

"What?"

"You pass. You can head upstairs."

"*Ha."*

"People like you… Yes, you need a contract. You're more than qualified for that. Let me ask you something… Do you have any intentions of signing a contract?"

"What a ridiculous question."

"This is a question for anyone who wishes to become a butler of the Demon King of Sunset's Castle."

"…"

“I’m a demon and a butler, after all.”

After the brief moment of calmness, Woo Hyo-Yeol lowered his arm and started walking toward Smith. It looked like he was thinking about Smith’s words. Colonel Smith seemed to have thought that Woo Hyo-Yeol was no longer being hostile because he stared quietly at him.

Woo Hyo-Yeol stood in front of Colonel Smith and looked up at the latter.

“I decline, you bastard,” he said.

Colonel Smith’s mustache trembled. Perhaps it was just me because it seemed like his eyes were becoming colder. His eyes became sharp and narrow, resembling those of a beast.

‘He’s angry.’

I felt like Colonel Smith was really angry.

“Just now…”

“I said I decline because I don’t like how you look.”

‘He’s angry.’

The strange play was already making him feel humiliated, and now an unknown punk was rebelling against him, making his blood boil.

Normally, Colonel Smith would just let it go, but…

‘He was given the role of a butler but was dumped in the sewers, so of course, he was on edge.’

There was no need for words.

He immediately loaded a round into his finger and fired at Woo Hyo-Yeol.

“I thought you treated your guests kindly?”

“Shut up.”

‘He’s ruining his concept… ‘

‘It’s becoming pretty intense.’

Party One was also struggling against Beast Tamer Alps, but…

“William!”

“*Aaaack!* Shield!”

“Push the bear away first!”

Woo Hyo-Yeol’s fight was more entertaining than ours.

“I’ll stab that disgusting face of yours.”

“I’ll put holes in that empty head of yours, you useless thug.”

CHAPTER 1185
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (5)

It wasn't really a dream match, but it was worth watching. In some ways, it was a good way to check Woo Hyo-Yeol's potential.

Will had already defeated him once, but Woo Hyo-Yeol had changed compared to how he was back then. I couldn't quite describe the change, but he was being fueled by his loss, and it made him train daily.

His growth rate was so rapid that it was impossible to ignore.

Since the final battle with Kim Hyun-Sung was near, he needed to defeat Black Butler Smith to save face. Actually, even if he ended up failing to defeat Black Butler Smith, he needed to show that he could hold up on his own, at the very least.

'If he gets defeated here like an idiot, it'll all be for nothing. Seriously, if you're going to die, at least die with honor.'

If he ended up losing here without showing how much he had changed, then the Doom Evolution would be meaningless. His potential was low anyway, so what good would an evolution do? Perhaps he would be good for a supporting role.

In order to get his lead role back, it was time for Woo Hyo-Yeol to prove his worth.

"I'll stab that disgusting face of yours."

"I'll put holes in that empty head of yours, you useless thug."

Right after provoking each other, Woo Hyo-Yeol attacked first, which wasn't a surprise at all. After adjusting his dual blades, he immediately swung them.

He probably didn't expect the winner to be decided so early.

He attacked to test the waters, but I was sure he was surprised when his blades were blocked so easily.

Schwik!

Black Butler Smith blocked Woo Hyo-Yeol's wrist using his arm and then…

Bang! Bang! Bang!

He fired magic bullets at close range; Woo Hyo-Yeol leaned back as if he had expected it, and then he moved his feet.

Rip!

I heard the sound of leather getting torn apart, but Woo Hyo-Yeol couldn't even inflict a lot of damage, let alone a decisive strike. Colonel Smith blocked Woo Hyo-Yeol's kick using his arm, and he used his other arm to block Woo Hyo-Yeol's follow-up attack.

It was loud, but Woo Hyo-Yeol's attacks were easily countered.

"*Ha!*"

'Colonel Smith always had sharp eyes. His eyes are probably better than yours.'

They practically started face to face, almost point-blank… so in a way, it was a distance that gave Woo Hyo-Yeol the advantage, but it was hard to say that he truly had the upper hand here. Normally, Colonel Smith preferred to fight from mid-range, but he was doing fine even in close-range combat.

'There's a reason why I recruited him.'

I couldn't really say that he was like Kim Hyun-Sung, Cha Hee-Ra, or Jung Ha-Yan, who had overwhelming power. I also couldn't say that his combat prowess would put him in the top 0.01%, but if I had to rank him, I would

say he was in the mid-to-high rank within the Blue Guild.

'Actually, maybe he's lower than that.'

He lacked stats when compared to Kim Ye-Ri, who had crazy stats, but he knew how to use his experience and years of expertise to make up for the things he lacked.

Being weak in close combat wasn't an issue when dealing with someone at Woo Hyo-Yeol's level. His keen eyesight, which allowed him to target so many enemies at the same time, allowed him to easily track oncoming attacks.

Woo Hyo-Yeol's gaze, the faint trembling of his muscles, and his footwork…

Even the trajectory of Woo Hyo-Yeol's attacks was captured in Colonel Smith's eyes. Although it was impossible for him to instinctively get information like Mind's Eye, his eyes saw through all of Woo Hyo-Yeol's movements.

'Of course, it's probably not that easy for him to see through all those.'

Woo Hyo-Yeol was one of the most cunning people I had ever met, and by "cunning" I wasn't talking about how good he was at faking things. To put it simply, his attacks were hard to read at a glance. He didn't have any set patterns, and even if people could read his moves, they would find it difficult to understand his intentions.

Even if people could understand his intentions, their assumption could be wrong.

As expected, Colonel Smith was feeling uncomfortable with the physical contact, and it was proven by how his mustache was twitching.

"You're weaker than I thought."

'Hyo-Yeol, you always get beaten up after that. Don't put your guard down and give it your all, damn it.'

Bang!

"Die, you bastard!"

"…"

Fists, feet, dagger, elbow, and shoulders… After performing a few more attacks, a fight of deception and wit ensued. The explosions and the whizzing of magic bullets pervaded the air.

Bang! Boom! Boom!

Colonel Smith grabbed Woo Hyo-Yeol's wrist and fired a magic bullet, but the latter spun like a top and made the former let go of him.

Colonel Smith tilted his head to dodge Woo Hyo-Yeol's attack, and then he lashed out with his leg, forcing Woo Hyo-Yeol to lean back and dodge.

Black Butler Smith moved back a little. The retreat wasn't that far, but it was enough distance for Colonel Smith to draw a bead on his opponent.

"Die."

Bang! Bang! Bang!

I heard clicking noises from Black Butler Smith's finger, and a hail of bullets swept toward Woo Hyo-Yeol. The mana-infused "muzzle" spat fire one after another as if they were determined to put holes in Woo Hyo-Yeol.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Bang! Bang! Bang!

'This is bad.'

I felt like nothing would be left of Woo Hyo-Yeol if he were to get hit by so many bullets. I couldn't really see Woo Hyo-Yeol due to the smoke, but I knew

he was safe. The muzzle was moving up and down, relentlessly firing at Woo Hyo-Yeol, who was running away.

And then…

"You've got a sharp eye."

'What's with that line that only Villain Song would say?'

With a *crackle,* the glowstones illuminating the sewers shattered. Actually, it was more like Woo Hyo-Yeol was breaking them. The faint lights that brightly lit the sewer faded away before being replaced by darkness.

My vision went dark.

Bang!

Whenever a magic bullet was fired, there would be a flash of light, but besides that, everything was dark. It was actually because of that flash of light that my eyes started hurting.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

The blade in Woo Hyo-Yeol's hand flew toward Black Butler Smith's arm amidst the darkness.

Bang!

I saw a magic bullet piercing Woo Hyo-Yeol's stomach, and then it turned dark again.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Every time there was a flash of light, I would see the two wrestling with each other. Colonel Smith attacked Woo Hyo-Yeol's chin using his elbow, and Woo Hyo-Yeol attacked Colonel Smith's abdomen with his knee.

It turned dark again.

Bang! Bang! Boom!

Black Butler Smith was pushed back.

Bang!

Colonel Smith frowned.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Woo Hyo-Yeol's eyes were bloodshot. I wasn't sure if he entered some kind of zone, but I saw his body getting hotter.

Just like Colonel Smith, Woo Hyo-Yeol's two daggers were no longer in his hands.

It seemed that he could no longer use them, as he had been using them to block the magic bullets. Obviously, he couldn't care less. Swordsmanship wasn't something one could put into a mold, and in Woo Hyo-Yeol's eyes, swords were simply a means to kill, nothing more, nothing less.

As if they were glued together, the two exchanged punches, refusing to separate. At some point, I heard a loud *thwack* and the sound of hands punching leather.

There was a grotesque *crack*, and I was sure someone's bone had shattered.

Bang!

Another faint light flashed, and I saw one of Woo Hyo-Yeol's arms bending in a strange way. Despite the scary sight, he was smiling.

"*Ha… hahahaha!*"

I heard a loud peal of laughter.

“Punch me harder, you bastard!”

“…”

“*Tch!* Damn it!”

“Hyo-Yeol oppa! Are you okay? Hyo-Yeol oppa!”

“Stay back.”

“What?”

“I said, stay back!”

Thwack! Crack! Bang!

‘Yeah, stay back. No one can get close anyway since it’s dark.’

He was trying to overcome his limits. Actually, I was not really sure whether that was what he was trying to do or not, but the important thing was that the current situation was affecting him in a positive way.

Just like how Hee-Ra noona overcame her limits with her fierce battle against Jung Ha-Yan, Woo Hyo-Yeol was learning something from Colonel Smith.

What he needed was malice and hatred…

An opponent he could fight without relying on tactics or intellect, but on sheer animal instinct. Normally, Colonel Smith, the Black Butler, fought with his calculated and calm persona… but in this case, his rare fury was becoming an advantage for him.

“*Hahahaha! Hahahaha!*”

I heard a peal of uproarious laughter.

Bang!

There was a flash of light, and I saw a magic bullet piercing Woo Hyo-Yeol's side.

Despite that, he was clearly cornering Colonel Smith.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Light flashed, and more holes appeared in Woo Hyo-Yeol's figure, but Colonel Smith was being pushed back.

It turned dark again.

"You bastard!!!"

"Die, you thug."

"*Aaaargh!*

"…"

"*Tch! Ack!"*

Crack.

Booooooooooom!

"I'll kill you. I'll kill you!

"You're the one… who's going to die…"

"I'll kill you if it's the last thing I do, you mustache freak!"

"Right back at you."

'Ahh, who should I cheer for?'

The answer was obvious.

‘I’m sorry, Colonel. I’m sorry… ‘

Rooting for Woo Hyo-Yeol was the right thing to do because Colonel Smith wasn’t going to die anyway. Boosting Woo Hyo-Yeol’s growth and confidence was the top priority, so I had to cheer for him this time.

“*Aaaaah!!!”*

A deafening silence descended. The silence lasted for so long that the people nearby felt uncomfortable. I was sure that was the case, as a mage in Party Three cast a spell to illuminate the place.

I saw Colonel Smith covered in blood, and he was leaning on Woo Hyo-Yeol.

‘He’s always so dramatic.’

Thud!

Black Butler Smith fell to the ground.

“I told you that I would kill you.”

Woo Hyo-Yeol lifted his foot to crush Colonel Smith’s head, but a bright light engulfed Colonel Smith and—

[You have encountered Elena, the Cursed Elf Queen of the Demon King of Sunset’s Castle.]

[You have encountered Arkimo, the Blood-crazed Holy Knight of the Demon King of Sunset’s Castle.]

[You have encountered Eryel, the Queen of Succubi and Mistress of Seduction of the Demon King of Sunset’s Castle.]

[You have encountered Barkdeku, the Gatekeeper of the Dark Shield of the Demon King of Sunset’s Castle.]

[You have encountered Hwang Jung-Yeon, the Collection Manager of the Demon King of Sunset's Castle.]

[You have encountered Yoo Ah-Young, the Armory Manager of the Demon King of Sunset's Castle.]

[You have encountered Lian, the Shadow Assassin of the Demon King of Sunset's Castle.]

Gatekeeper of the Dark Shield Barkdeku swung his arm and—

Boom!

Craaack!

Blood burst out of Woo Hyo-Yeol, and he was sent flying into a wall.

CHAPTER 1186
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (6)

Of course…

'That pig.'

I saw Woo Hyo-Yeol rolling around, covered in blood, but I was obviously happy to see the pig, so I looked at him first. Perhaps it was because it had been a while since I saw him, but…

'He's looking pretty sharp.'

I probably felt that way, as he looked bigger than the last time I saw him.

Perhaps this was how a father would feel upon realizing that his child had grown up. His shiny black equipment stood out the most. He didn't have the massive shield he normally carried around, but the black shield adorned with hideous decorations in his hand was clearly better than his previous equipment.

Every piece of equipment Park Deok-Gu previously equipped had received acknowledgement from me.

It was a custom set, carefully selected and tailored to suit Park Deok-Gu perfectly. He was equipped with some of the highest quality and most valuable items on the continent, and I even felt proud to see him, as if I had raised him myself, when I saw him in that gear.

Under these circumstances, he looked like a completely different person, and it was all thanks to his brand-new equipment. I was sure they obtained those items from the 21st Legion's equipment storage, but… still…

'You know what I mean.'

If I had to give an example, he was like a baby bird who had left the nest and returned home all grown up. In addition, it was like he had come back home equipped with fancy feathers.

"That pig…" I mumbled.

Besides him, I saw other faces I was happy to see, but…

'What good is it if everyone is here?'

I couldn't help but have that thought. It was heartbreaking to see Colonel Smith getting beaten up mercilessly, but at this point, I had to wonder if it was necessary to bring out all the members of the Blue Guild. And him…

'Hyo-Yeol, you're not dead, are you?'

I saw a figure lying on the ground. He was knocked out by Park Deok-Gu's heavy attack. He barely survived the deadly duel with Colonel Smith, and he was twitching incessantly on the ground as if every bone in his body had shattered.

"Hyo-Yeol oppa!!!" Lim Chae-Ryeong screamed.

"Mr. Hyo-Yeol!"

"L-Leader!"

Nam Goong-Seon and No Dam-Hye run toward him in shock.

"Unni! Hurry, unni!"

"Melody of Healing!"

"Don't die… don't die! I said, don't die! You idiot! You idiot!"

"Unni! Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!"

"Right now…"

“He’s not going to die, right? Hyo-Yeol oppa is fine, right? Right? He’ll be okay, right?!”

‘If you’re worried, let her focus on playing the song.’

Lim Chae-Ryeong looked like a mess as she looked at Woo Hyo-Yeol. She seemed completely out of it, and No Dam-Hye, who was casting her Melody of Healing, looked like she was out of it as well.

To make things worse, Woo Hyo-Yeol’s hands and feet would stiffen from time to time, making me think that he was going to die.

Lim Chae-Ryeong had to have reached the same conclusion as me. She looked pale as she started doing chest compressions on Woo Hyo-Yeol.

“Don’t die! Don’t die! Please… don’t die! You bad-tempered thug!”

“…”

“Are you really going to die like this? Really? Are you really?!”

‘Of course… he’s not going to die.’

Kim Ye-Ri was also aware of the fact that he was the only one with potential.

I couldn’t help but wonder if they had stormed in like some gang from the 90s to save the battered Colonel Smith, but Kim Ye-Ri was someone who knew how to draw a firm line between business and personal matters.

I thought appearing like this was a way to move on to the next scene, and my assumption was right. If that weren’t the case, they wouldn’t dress up like that.

‘But still, isn’t lining up like that really old-fashioned?’

They looked like a typical group of villains, and it looked like one of those scenes where a whole gang of eccentric villains had shown up and the

protagonist's party would have to face them.

Some of them covered themselves by wearing capes or hoodies, but Kim Ye-Ri showed her face.

"*Hmph.* Humans truly don't value their lives, gathering here like a horde of ants."

Despite her nickname, Eryel, the Queen of Succubi and Mistress of Seduction, she was speaking too politely and was even dressed properly. Her belly button and legs were exposed, but to be honest, it was no different from her usual outfit.

Her tight-fitting clothes were normal outfits she wore as an assassin, so in reality, all she had done was add a few accessories to complete the look. She had to have thought that she needed to have a cape as well, as she was wearing one, which she was dragging across the floor.

"Or… did you come here to have fun with Eryel, the Queen of Succubi and Mistress of Seduction?"

'I'm seriously going crazy.'

'This is insane.'

I could actually feel goosebumps all over myself.

Without realizing it, I almost curled up from the cringe.

"It's what I wanted as well, but… all of you aren't prepared yet."

'Prepared for what?'

"You aren't prepared to dive into pure pleasure."

'This is bad.'

I was starting to have a hard time breathing.

“I’m hoping it’ll turn out to be somewhat fun, but…”

“*Kgh…*”

“Maybe… I was expecting too much. I can’t believe you were defeated so easily by the Gatekeeper of the Dark Shield, the weakest of the Four Heavenly Kings.”

“*Mmm!*”

It seemed like the Gatekeeper of the Dark Shield was mute.

“Don’t you agree, Gatekeeper of the Dark Shield?”

“*Mmm! Mmmm!*”

The Gatekeeper of the Dark Shield, Park Deok-Gu, made unnatural noises while gesturing exaggeratedly.

“*Ohm! Om! Ohhhm!*”

“*Ha?* Potential? Did you say potential just now?”

“*Ohm! Ohm! Oohm!*”

“We need to kill them right now? *Ha!* Gatekeeper of Dark Shield… are you planning on ruining our entertainment with your useless worries?”

“*Ohm! Ohhhm!*”

“You worry too much about things that don’t matter. I can’t believe you’re worried about those lowly mortals who don’t even know how to walk properly.

“Black Butler Smith might’ve fallen, but that’s because they got lucky. If he hadn’t put his guard down, he wouldn’t have ended up in this state.”

"*Ohm…*"

- *Haha.* You don't need to be so hard on him, Eryel, the Queen of Succubi and Mistress of Seduction.

"*Ho…* Arkimo, the Blood-crazed Holy Knight. Is there something you want to say as well?"

"No, it's not that, but… the Gatekeeper of Dark Shield has a point. The fact that mere humans were able to take down Black Butler Smith is truly unbelievable, but it actually happened right before our eyes."

"So, you plan on ruining my fun as well…"

"That's not what I was trying to say, Lady Eryel."

"Then…"

"I want to drink their blood to quench my thirst right now… but they're still lacking in many ways. They won't bring entertainment… nor will they satisfy you, Lady Eryel. To elaborate a bit, the humans before us are mere insects who don't deserve your attention."

"*Ohm! Ohhhhm!*"

"*Hmm…* you do have a point, Arkimo."

"…"

"…"

"Let's have the Collection Manager deal with them."

"*Hmm…*"

"If they die here, it proves that they're worthless beings who are unfit to face you. If they happen to take down the Collection Manager, that too will be

pleasant entertainment."

Arkimo, the Blood-crazed Holy Knight, spoke with a sly smile. I could clearly see the character description of the Park-Ki-Ri siblings. I could also see why the story was unfolding this way.

It was a clichéd pattern.

Treating humans as insects and then getting defeated was a typical cliche…

They believed Black Butler Smith was defeated because he had put his guard down. If he had fought with all his might, they believed that he wouldn't have lost. This was a common tragic story that happened to villains when they underestimated their enemies.

'Actually… '

Their characters had depth. The Queen of Succubi was arrogant, and the Gatekeeper of the Dark Shield expressed his thoughts, but he was often looked down on for being the weakest among them.

"*Ohhhhm!*"

The problem was that those two weren't in the best condition. Fortunately, Arkimo was maintaining the balance as if he were walking on a tightrope.

Arkimo was the reason I managed to get somewhat immersed in this play. His slightly smiling, half-closed eyes were subtly conveying an obsession and craving for blood. He was also guiding the flow of the story in a way that wouldn't make him stand out.

In reality, the only thing Kim Ye-Ri was doing was nodding at Ahn Ki-Mo's words.

"*Hm…* that's a pretty good suggestion, Arkimo."

"I'm just grateful that you decided to take it, Lady Eryel."

“But if they die so easily… it won’t quench your thirst.”

“You don’t have to worry, Lady Eryel. When that time comes, I’ll direct my anger towards Rohen.”

“You… haven’t… changed. You’re excessively cruel… *A-Achoo!* Yes… you’re cruel…”

“I’ll take that as a compliment.”

‘I’m glad this is at least working.’

While the Gatekeeper of the Dark Shield, capable of sending Woo Hyo-Yeol flying with one hand, was indeed formidable, the villains before them were also exuding an extraordinary presence. I was sure they were aware of that fact.

I was sure the adventurers hadn’t noticed anything strange about Kim Ye-Ri’s awkward attempt at playing the role of the Queen of Succubi. They were either just afraid or…

“Damn it…”

“I don’t want to… die, damn it…”

“Shit… how is something like that…”

They were having a bad reaction to their presence.

“Enough with the bullshit! You dirty demons!”

They reacted to Ahn Ki-Mo’s comment about how he was going to take out his anger on Rohen. It didn’t apply to all humans, but some humans would become stronger when they had something to protect. It was like they were born with the hero DNA.

Basically, Ahn Ki-Mo had reminded the ones with potential why they needed

to fight.

'Yeah, at least you're the one saving this play. You're really carrying this, Ki-Mo.'

"Then, let's do as you say, Arkimo."

"Yes, ma'am.

"Collection Manager Hwang Jung-Yeon, we'll leave this place to you."

"I'll make sure to meet your expectations, Lady Eryel of Seduction."

This was a random question, but why were some of them using Korean names?

'And no one bothered to point that out?'

They had names like Eryel and Arkimo, but suddenly, a woman named Hwang Jung-Yeon had popped out. Wasn't that strange? There were a few awkward moments, but the play continued just like that.

Hwang Jung-Yeon cast her spell, and a giant white light emerged from the ground.

"Item 4—Magnetic Field Position Shifter. It's one of the numbered items the 21st Legion is proud of. I'm overjoyed to show you the collection of the Demon King's Castle, you uncultured beings."

The scenery changed, and true to her title, "Collection Manager," Party Three was moved to a massive warehouse. The items inside the warehouse were packed together, and it looked like they were inside a logistics warehouse.

"I really wanted to use this item."

She had a really good memory, so the role suited her perfectly.

"Item 213—Infernal Magic Golem!"

A giant golem burning with green flames landed in the warehouse.

"*Roaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaar!!!*"

"Entertain them."

"…"

Party Three had lost a considerable amount of firepower due to Woo Hyo-Yeol's severe injuries, and they found themselves in a situation that was almost like a death sentence, but…

'Damn, Hyun-Sung. Are all those items… ours now?'

I couldn't help but smile.

CHAPTER 1187
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (7)

It had been a while since I last heard good news.

The number of items reminded me of the Rift Museum, and if these items belonged to the vanquished demon lord, then I was sure they were better than the items at the Rift Museum.

The former Commander of the 21st Legion, who was taken down by Hyun-Sung, seemed to have an obsession with collecting rare items. Belial's warehouse was impressive as well, but it was slightly different from this.

'Belial looked like he was just collecting useless things like random pieces of art… '

He had unidentifiable tribal flags, totem-like objects, and even artworks from Earth. I wasn't saying they were bad, but obviously, they couldn't be compared to the items the 21st Legion had collected up until now.

Based on our continent's standards, the items were mostly Legendary and Semi-Mythic, and collections numbered in the 10s looked like Mythic items.

Obviously, I thought the allied forces would be able to power up significantly if we managed to overcome this trial. Of course, I could only think of five people capable of using those items, but the fact that we could strengthen the named adventurers, like Woo Hyo-Yeol and William, was good enough/

'The rest will be mine.'

The items obviously belonged to Kim Hyun-Sung, but what was mine was mine.

The fact that Kim Hyun-Sung was also mine was the secret to keeping our

bond strong.

'No matter how much I think about it, it's the best gift ever.'

It was enough for me to overlook the mistake he had made when he was drunk.

'Actually, that's not all. Wasn't there an Armory Manager? It was Yoo Ah-Young, right?'

Aside from these strange and fascinating items, there was also a separate armory. We already had plenty of valuable items, but the more, the merrier. I did my best to keep a straight face, but the corner of my lips was going up.

'We should hurry up and go.'

"Miss Chae-Ryeong," I said.

"M-Mr. Ki-Young! Hyo-Yeol oppa…"

"I-I'm watching as well," I interrupted her.

When I made myself sound like I was holding back my tears, I heard Lim Chae-Ryeong's sobs.

"*Heuk… heuuuk…* What should we do? I think Hyo-Yeol oppa is going to die. *Heuk…* He's not moving… *heuk… heuk…* Goong-Seon and Dam-Hye unni have been by his side… but he's not moving. *Heuk…"*

"…'

"*Heuk…* I don't… like this anymore…"

"It'll be fine, Miss Chae-Ryeong. Mr. Woo Hyo-Yeol… I-I'm sure he'll make it," I reassured her.

-…

"I-I'll head there right now," I told her.

"*Ah!*" Lim Chae-Ryeong's face brightened up. I was a saint-level priest, so this was obviously good news for her. Of course, it didn't take long for her face to become gloomy again.

Woo Hyo-Yeol was dying, so time was running out, but she couldn't really figure out her role in this massive Demon King's Castle.

Every second was important at the moment, and it was actually impossible for me to go over there, but as always, there was a way.

However, it could be a slightly difficult task for her.

"We need the Magnetic Field Position Shifter. It's the same artifact that moved Party Three…" I said.

"Excuse me?"

"Think you can get it?" I asked.

"…"

"…"

"I can…"

"I'll provide backup for the operation from here. Miss No Dam-Hye and Miss Nam Goong-Seon… will also provide support from behind," I added.

"Yes, sir."

"You really think… you can do it?" I asked.

"Yes, I can do it. No, I *have* to do it. I must do it."

'I wonder if it's even possible.'

From Lim Chae-Ryeong's point of view, she had to succeed. She probably felt like Woo Hyo-Yeol's life depended on her, so I was sure that gave her enough motivation to succeed.

'Letting Grandpa Bolt go was a good choice.'

The traumatic event made them feel desperate in situations like this.

Lim Chae-Ryeong jumped up and looked ahead. After tying her hair tightly, she placed her armor on the floor. Excluding items that had bonus Agility stats, which helped her run fast, it seemed like she was trying to unequip all of her equipment.

Obviously, her eyes were filled with determination to save Woo Hyo-Yeol.

"The only thing I can do is help you reach the Collection Manager, Miss Chae-Ryeong. Besides that, everything depends on you," I informed her.

"Okay."

"Good luck," I said.

"Thank you, sir."

"…"

"…"

"Let's go," I ordered.

"Melody of Agility!"

A Movement Speed buff was cast, and Lim Chae-Ryeong immediately started running.

"*Roooooooooar!*"

Item 213: Infernal Magic Golem was standing in front of her. Overwhelming

and huge wasn't enough to describe the size and overwhelming presence of the golem burning with green flames.

Some of the members of Party Three were scared and were holding their breath, afraid of getting discovered, so I sent a message to others who were motivated to carry out the raid.

Their job was to open up a path.

"Stay as far back as possible! Don't let it get too close, damn it!"

"*Roooooooar!*"

Rumble! Ruuuuuuumble!

The golem swung its large arms, unleashing infernal flames imbued with magic. Mages cast barrier spells, but the transparent barriers were too weak. Dozens of barriers were stacked, but they lasted only a few minutes.

Fortunately, they managed to buy enough time for a certain individual.

Lim Chae-Ryeong broke through the scorching heat with gnashed teeth. The fire had died down, but the heat was still there, as she looked like she was in pain. Fire burned beneath her feet, but Lim Chae-Ryeong didn't seem to care as she ran even faster.

"Chae-Ryeong!"

Nam Goong-Seon cast recovery spells on her, but her spells weren't strong enough to restore Lim Chae-Ryeon's health to full.

'She's on the brink of dying.'

Raymond Bolt's legacy was the reason she managed to endure the pain and keep running.

"This time… I won't let him die."

'Chae-Ryeong… '

" Never… never!"

I thought it was time to show something, and I could probably do it sooner than I expected.

"So there's a struggling pest… I think it'll be fun to crush them, but…"

Hwang Jung-Yeon noticed her.

"I really wanted to use Item 412—Random Magic Box, and I think this is the right time to use it."

A small box adorned with geometric patterns appeared above Hwang Jung-Yeon's head.

When the box opened, a massive tsunami poured out of it.

"That spell was pretty disappointing. *Wheeew…* looks like this was a mistake."

"*Ahh…"* Lim Chae-Ryeong cast a despair-filled gaze at the massive waves, which were several times larger than herself. Her face looked as if she was saying, "Is it over?" but she bit her lips and stepped toward the waves with her dagger in hand.

Boom!

I saw Nam Goong-Seon hugging Lim Chae-Ryeong, becoming her shield.

"Un… ni!!!"

"Go! Chae-Ryeong!"

Nam Goong-Seon spoke as the waves swept her away. Lim Chae-Ryeong used her dagger to charge through the small opening Nam Goong-Seon had made

for her, allowing her to come out on the other side.

Although she was soaking wet, she didn't stop running.

"Item 11—Ice Dust Clock."

"*Yaaaaaaaaaaah!!!*"

A giant hourglass appeared behind Hwang Jung-Yeon, but it was filled with snowflakes, not sand. As the snowflakes fell, a sudden chill swept across the surroundings, and it looked as if time had frozen in place.

'I think she took out the random-whatever item just for fun… That… That's the real deal.'

I wanted to focus on Lim Chae-Ryeong as well, but I couldn't snap out of it because it felt like I was watching a showcase for Lee Ki-Young.

'I'm so happy.'

Each time a gift was presented, my heart would race.

"Item 56—Chanelia Hermes's Battle Backpack."

'Get that out of my face, damn it.'

Naturally, I immediately came back to reality.

"*Yaaaaaaaah!*

"Struggling is futile."

While I was focused on the showcase, Lim Chae-Ryeong made a mad dash for her target while withstanding the biting cold that had engulfed her.

There wasn't a lot of time until the snowflakes in the hourglass fell to the bottom. I had no idea what kind of item that was, but unless one were stupid, one could see that it would have a negative effect on the allied forces once

the countdown was over.

Obviously, Lim Chae-Ryeong clenched her fist and gritted her teeth. With the help of her wounded comrades, she continued running toward her target.

And that was when I saw hesitation on Hwang Jung-Yeon's face.

'She's too soft-hearted… '

Before she realized it, she fixed her glasses and focused on her acting, but I was sure she pitied Lim Chae-Ryeong, who was struggling desperately.

It was highly likely that she believed that pitying someone wasn't wrong. At this moment, she was clearly in a position to take pity on someone. That was probably why—even though Lim Chae-Ryeong was already right in front of her—she really didn't do anything.

"Item 9—Aegis' Shield Fragment."

For a moment, it seemed like they made contact, but Lim Chae-Ryeong's dagger was easily blocked by the shield that appeared in the sky. To make things worse, the impact was so strong that she crashed into a wall.

"Attacks don't work on me. That was a sad attempt."

"*He… hehe.* I already knew that from the start…"

"You…

"I'm a thief." Lim Chae-Ryeong raised a small bracelet.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young! How do you activate this thing?! Hurry! Hurry!"

It was easy to figure out how to operate it, so I immediately started talking.

Then, Lim Chae-Ryeong appeared before me with a flash of white light.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young?" Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

“You did well, Miss Chae-Ryeong,” I said.

Lim Chae-Ryeong staggered forward when she saw me. Of course, I immediately caught her.

‘I should send the bear somewhere else first.’

The bear was disrupting the balance between Party One, who was still carrying out the raid, and Beast Tamer Alps. I activated the Magnetic Field Position Shifter and saw the bear being enveloped in light.

All three of them needed to be together for their mechanic to be effective, so if one of them was missing, the allied forces should be able to take care of them even without the named adventurers.

“*Ah!* The bear! I mean… *hohohoho!*”

‘Having only Emilia there should be enough.’

It was our turn to make a move…

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young?”

“Mr. William, Miss Ha-Yan,” I said.

I grabbed their hands tightly and activated the device.

I felt like I got sucked into a jewelry box.

‘All of this… All of this is mine, damn it.’

I noticed myself desperately hoping that I was the real Lee Ki-Young.

‘I’m really happy right now.’

CHAPTER 1188
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (8)

"M-Mr. Lee Ki-Young…" Lim Chae-Ryeong mumbled.

"…"

"M-Mr. Lee Ki-Young… Mr. Lee Ki-Young…" she repeated.

"…"

"Is Hyo-Yeol oppa okay? Is he…"

'Damn, I'm so out of it.'

"Is he going to live?" Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

I wanted to enjoy Lee Ki-Young's gift room a bit longer, but I had to come back to my senses after hearing Lim Chae-Ryeong calling out for me.

'Yeah, I almost forgot about him.'

I turned and saw Woo Hyo-Yeol still sprawled out on the ground.

His wounds looked like they had healed, but he still wasn't moving.

"Is Hyo-Yeol oppa—"

"He'll be fine," I interrupted her.

"R-Right? He'll be fine, right?" Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

She seemed like she was having trouble talking, and I was sure the fact that he was still not moving made her feel bothered. Realistically, Lim Chae-

Ryeong wasn't in a normal state either. In the battle just now, she clearly overcame her limits.

She was injured from her fight with Hwang Jung-Yeon, and I was sure her muscles were screaming in pain.

I was sure she had never been more desperate in her life before, so she was definitely exhausted mentally. I wouldn't be surprised if she lost consciousness right now, but despite her exhaustion and injuries, she kept asking about Woo Hyo-Yeol's condition.

'Is there really something going on between them?'

Was there something between them that was even stronger than Raymond Bolt's legacy? She seemed really affectionate toward him. It was to the point that I couldn't say that it was because they had been working together for quite a while now.

I was really surprised. Perhaps Lim Chae-Ryeong had feelings for him.

"I'm… going to save him no matter what, so don't worry, Miss Chae-Ryeong," I reassured her.

"Please… save him, Mr. Ki-Young," Lim Chae-Ryeong begged.

"…"

'But you know, he's not going to die anyway.'

Even if Park Deok-Gu had evolved, Woo Hyo-Yeol wasn't *that* weak that he would die from a single swing from the pig. Of course, the holes made by Colonel Smith were probably the main reason why he was still on the ground, but they were too weak to be called finishing blows.

Woo Hyo-Yeol's Endurance was pretty high, and his willpower was strong as well. Most importantly, he was determined to stay alive. The only thing he had going for him was the fact that he was as tenacious as a cockroach.

'He won't die unless his head gets chopped off.'

Naturally, I hurried towards Woo Hyo-Yeol.

Hwang Jung-Yeon looked happy to see me, but she instantly remembered her role because she glared at Jung Ha-Yan and William.

"Mr. William, Miss Ha-Yan, I'll leave the Collection Manager to you two," I requested.

"Understood."

"Okay, o-oppa."

The second round of the raid started, and Hwang Jung-Yeon had to have realized that this was the right time to enter the next phase because several items appeared before her. Instead of using two items at a time, a handful of items were floating in the air.

Lightning struck, and there was even a tsunami.

"*Haa…* this one is a bust too," Hwang Jung-Yeon sighed.

The Infernal Magic Golem got up again and summoned a tornado. A gravity field was also cast, and some of the players started floating in the air. A natural disaster was unfolding before their eyes, causing most of the players to just stare at the situation.

'Clearly… the founding members are different.'

I felt it once before with the Forsaken Saint Sun Hee-Young, but it felt like this dungeon was designed on a different scale than ordinary high-ranking demons or gatekeepers of the underground waterways.

Their mechanics were high quality, and it was hard to figure out a way to clear the dungeon.

Hwang Jung-Yeon skilfully used artifacts in the right places; she was constantly rotating between them, and it seemed like she was enjoying it.

As a mage, she was nowhere near Jung Ha-Yan, but she was not incompetent.

As a researcher, I was convinced that she was better than Jung Ha-Yan—no, the entire continent. Unlike Jung Ha-Yan, who could instinctively figure everything out, Hwang Jung-Yeon had to study, and he was always studying.

She was always studying theories, spells, and magic itself. She had a constant craving for knowledge, and she had a massive library in her head where she could access information whenever she wanted. She didn't possess Mind's Eye… but merely relying on the magical knowledge in her mind to explore, study, utilize, and make use of those artifacts was almost an accomplishment in itself.

'She's not a computer like Max… '

Hwang Jung-Yeon needed more points in her Magic.

'For some reason, it looks like she believes that she can fight Ha-Yan.'

I wouldn't exactly describe her as competitive, but there seemed to be a hint of curiosity in her eyes.

'I wonder how much of it will work.'

Her feelings weren't mixed with curiosity or jealousy about how far her knowledge of magic and sorcery would take her. It was pure intellectual curiosity and a passion for discovery.

Just then, Jung Ha-Yan cast her spell, and a giant wall of ice appeared, blocking the tsunami. A clump of mana engulfed the lightning, and a water spirit manifested, crushing the Infernal Magic Golem.

Craaaaaaaackle!

Kabooooooooom!

"Item 11—Ice Dust Clock," Hwang Jung-Yeon said. When the snowflakes in the hourglass fell again, everything around it froze.

"*Ah*, it's hot," Jung Ha-Yan said, and heat emerged from the ground.

'Her... original power is starting to return. What the hell... is wrong with her growth speed?'

Jung Ha-Yan spun one of her fingers, and a magic orb appeared, landing on the hourglass. Jung Ha-Yan used her other hand to draw a "V" and shook it. Immediately afterward, an item that looked like a long whip attacked the Infernal Magic Golem.

She looked like a child performing magic tricks, but fine mana flew around Jung Ha-Yan's fingertip.

'She's no joke.'

William and some of the players couldn't hide their surprise at the sight, but they were still fighting the Collection Manager in their own way.

Despite the fact that Jung Ha-Yan wasn't really protecting the allied players, William understood exactly what he needed to do and the role he needed to play here. The clashes between mana made it seem like there wasn't any opening, but he drew crimson flowers while roaming between the two.

"*Tch.*"

"Burst."

Kabooooooom!

"Support."

When the Infernal Magic Golem lost its form because of William's attacks,

three gargoyle statues fell from the sky.

“Item 7—Clandas’ Gargoyle,” Hwang Jung-Yeon summoned.

The gargoyles moved and pushed away the players approaching Hwang Jung-Yeon, and they even approached Jung Ha-Yan.

The giant water spirit grabbed one of the gargoyles, but a massive column of flame materialized, vaporizing the water spirit. Jung Ha-Yan blinked once, and the magic orb subdued the massive flames. In response, eight arms appeared from the darkness and devoured the magic orb.

It wasn’t easy to see battles like this on our continent, but based on my standards, a battle of monsters was unfolding before my eyes.

I wanted to keep watching, but it was heartbreaking that I couldn’t do it.

It couldn’t be helped since we were in an urgent situation.

“Mr. Hyo-Yeol… Mr. Hyo-Yeol!” I shouted.

‘It actually doesn’t seem that urgent.’

No Dam-Hye and Nam Goong-Seon were keeping Woo Hyo-Yeol alive by exhausting all of their mana, and I also had to show how desperate I was.

“Call the other priests!” I shouted.

“What… *ah*… okay!”

My face was filled with resolve to save Woo Hyo-Yeol. No Dam-Hye, who struggled to hold up her exhausted body, looked nervous again. Perhaps she felt that Woo Hyo-Yeol’s condition was finally stable because she showed a sense of relief, but it didn’t last long.

A priest from the Flower and Fertility Familia appeared, and they looked frantic, making No Dam-Hye feel like something was wrong.

“I-It’s not over yet,” No Dam-Hye stuttered.

I said nothing. Instead, I cast a spell, and a massive magic circle made of light appeared on the ground. It was a useless magic circle, but it was emanating a beautiful light, which was really important.

After all, the visuals were important.

I approached Woo Hyo-Yeol and fed him an unknown potion.

Woo Hyo-Yeol immediately started having a seizure.

“Hold him down!” I ordered.

“O-Okay!”

He was wriggling while foaming at the mouth, so my potion was effective. He was unconscious, but he was still a warrior, so we were struggling to hold him down.

“Stand in the magic circle. I need to cast a resurrection spell right now. I have to concentrate… so please make sure not to make any mistakes,” I informed them.

“O-Okay.”

“Hyo-Yeol oppa… *heuk…* Is Hyo-Yeol oppa really okay?” Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

“…”

“Hyo-Yeol oppa! Hang in there. H-Hang in there…” Lim Chae-Ryeong shouted.

“Please take care of Miss Chae-Ryeong. You two, please come here!” I instructed.

The promise I made that day… to never let anyone die before me again…

That promise popped up in my mind.

Even the nearby warriors rushed toward us and helped us hold Woo Hyo-Yeol down. The seizures told everyone that Woo Hyo-Yeol was in a serious condition, and to make matters worse, his entire body was becoming stiffer as time went on.

His throbbing veins bulged all over him, and it looked like he was on the brink of exploding into a bloody mist. He was also vomiting black blood. Although I had no idea what was going on, I was sure he was in a life-or-death situation.

The remaining priests on the team also stood in the magic circle with a gloomy expression. They clearly knew what they needed to do because they unleashed their holy power without being told what to do.

Obviously, I was the star tonight.

I stood in the center of the magic circle and unleashed the brightest light since I arrived here.

The light was *literally* blinding.

'It looks holy.'

It was such a radiant and holy light.

I unleashed a radiant light while wearing the flower wreath made of light. The light itself was enough to make the injured adventurers stand up slowly.

They only had minor injuries, but the light engulfing them made them look enchanting.

'Yeah, that's it… '

A saint had descended. Flower petals fell down slowly one by one from the wreath of light. Those were hints that the spell was draining my lifeforce, but

the sad part was that no one noticed it—

—Until Nam Goong-Seon said something.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young… that’s…” she muttered.

“It’s fine,” I reassured her.

“Okay…”

“It’s fine. I’m… running out of time anyway,” I said.

“What?”

Naturally, I ignored her question because this holy ritual had to continue.

“W-What do you mean?” Nam Goong-Seon asked.

“…”

“What do you mean by that…” Nam Goong-Seon questioned.

“It’s nothing. I-I’m just sharing a bit of my lifeforce with him,” I told her.

“How can that be nothing…” Nam Goong-Seon mumbled.

“I… I won’t lose anyone again. Not anymore,” I vowed.

Woo Hyo-Yeol was waking up, so he probably heard me.

CHAPTER 1189
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (9)

I was sure Woo Hyo-Yeol heard my memorable line.

'I'm pretty sure this jerk is listening.'

He had put on quite the show, and it was time for him to wake up. Just as I expected, his fingers twitched, and it wasn't because of the seizure he had earlier. He was intentionally moving his fingers.

'He's awake.'

Naturally, I unleashed an even brighter light.

Of course, I heard voices trying to stop me, but…

"Please stop. Mr. Lee Ki-Young… please stop. If you keep going…"

I continued draining my lifeforce. Flower petals fell from the wreath of light, and the light grew larger as if it were a candle burning away. I was in my purest form, embodying the very essence of the word "sacrifice," and I looked as if the light was consuming me.

Who would dare to stop me?

"*Ahh…*" Nam Goong-Seon muttered, imagining something bad, but she couldn't decide whether to stop me or not. It was natural for her to hesitate, as I looked really desperate.

The obvious reason behind my desperation was that I didn't want to lose any of the people whom I cared about. However, my emotions couldn't be described with just one sentence. She couldn't stop me because she understood my feelings behind my actions and why I was so desperate.

"*Aaaaaaaaaah!*" I screamed.

"*Cough, cough*."

I coughed while trying to keep my trembling arms and eyes steady.

I was emanating a huge, radiant light. It was a warm light, but ironically, it was really cold for those who were at the center of the light.

The pain and fear caused me to grit my teeth. The fact that my lifeforce was slowly draining away was terrifying and unsettling, even for a twenty-three-year-old like me, but I quickly shook off that fear.

'I have to save him.'

I couldn't lose people whom I cared about again.

'I won't let him die.'

Grandpa Bolt was someone I couldn't protect, and one person… was enough. It was probably just me, but it felt like I could hear his voice.

My memories with him appeared like a panorama. Was it because I was becoming too emotional? If I couldn't stop thinking about his hand that often patted my head and his promise to protect me, was there something wrong with my head?

I wasn't afraid of the fact that I was draining my lifeforce. I still couldn't understand why Grandpa Bolt had thrown everything he had just to protect others, but at this moment, I understood how he felt when he sacrificed himself.

"Never again…" I mumbled.

"…"

"Never again!" I shouted.

For a moment, it felt like Grandpa Bolt was holding my hand—no, I was sure he was holding my hand. The holy power that exploded right after it consumed almost everything I had.

The light disappeared right afterward, but…

“Mr. Hyo-Yeol… get up,” I said.

“…”

“Get up,” I repeated.

“…” “Get up already!” I shouted.

Woo Hyo-Yeol still didn’t move.

Just then, a large gargoyle rushed toward me.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young, watch out—”

Seeing Hwang Jung-Yeon’s surprised face, it seemed like she was so focused on the battle that she couldn’t control the gargoyle that William had sent flying away.

William’s face turned pale.

‘No, this is actually better. We need scenes like this.’

I didn’t dodge. I couldn’t dodge anyway, but as if I couldn’t care less about myself, I poured my weak holy power into Woo Hyo-Yeol.

“Get up! Woo Hyo-Yeol!!” I yelled.

Bam!

Woo Hyo-Yeol blocked the gargoyle.

“Mr. Hyo-Yeol?”

“Hyo-Yeol… oppa… oppa?” Lim Chae-Ryeong mumbled.

His closed wounds opened up at once, and he was instantly drenched in his own blood. Blood flowed out of his head, and his arms were in bad shape once again.

“*Whoo… whoo… whoo… whoo…*”

He repeatedly exhaled and inhaled heavily. He entered the awakening state again, continuing from his fight with Colonel Smith. Actually, it was possible that he had been maintaining that state. I felt like he had been maintaining that state all this while.

There was a dark glint in his eyes, but his mind seemed sharper than ever.

Without even checking his condition, he said, “My… blade.”

“What?” I asked.

“My blade…” Woo Hyo-Yeol repeated.

“A-Are you out of your mind? Oppa… right now—” Lim Chae-Ryeong chimed in.

“Bring… me my blade,” he interrupted her.

‘You don’t have one, you jerk. It was destroyed during your fight with Colonel Smith.’

“It doesn’t matter which one, just bring me one. Hurry. *Whoo… whoo…*” Woo Hyo-Yeol requested.

At first, Lim Chae-Ryeong looked at him, wanting to stop him, but she ended up giving him her weapon with her eyes closed.

Woo Hyo-Yeol glanced at me.

"*Whoo…"* he mumbled, exhaling heavily. "Idiot…"

"…"

"You stupid… idiotic… foolish… bastard," he insulted me.

'So he was listening.'

He seemed to be having mixed emotions, but he obviously didn't spit out words of comfort or gratitude. He wasn't the type to say such embarrassing words, and his frown told me that he disliked the current situation.

After pushing me to the side, he looked at Hwang Jung-Yeon quietly. He was breathing heavily and started moving. One of the gargoyles got up and charged at Woo Hyo-Yeol, but its head was instantly chopped off.

Thud.

It was more like its head was blasted away, and it was slammed into the ground at the same time.

'Shit, he got stronger. I'm sure he got stronger compared to when he was fighting Colonel Smith.'

I had no idea why, but I was sure that…

'It's all coming back to him.'

Actually, I felt like he had already received it again. It all began with his one-on-one battle with Colonel Smith. The battle helped me realize how strong Woo Hyo-Yeol was in his first life and why Jupiter's group had chosen him as the regressor. Although his perfect stats hadn't returned, at least, he acquired the same senses he had in his first life.

"*Whoo… whoo…"* He walked while tightening his grip on his sword.

Crackle.

His step was so forceful that the ground caved in, and in an instant, he stormed into the fierce battlefield.

'That's intense.'

Rather than describing him as being agile or fast like Kim Hyun-Sung, the word "intense" was more suitable for him. He arrived in front of Hwang Jung-Yeon with just one step.

"Item 9—Aegis' Shield Fragment," Hwang Jung-Yeon said.

Woo Hyo-Yeol's sword struck the shield fragment, generating a deafening clang. It looked like he couldn't overcome the Mythic, as he was sent flying away. However, he bounced off a wall and jumped toward Hwang Jung-Yeon once again.

Booom!

"*Ugh.*"

The mage gritted her teeth. A magic orb and a crimson flower fell on top of her, but…

"Item 2—Ruten's Grand Clock," Hwang Jung-Yeon summoned.

Everything around slowed down, including the crimson flower, the magic orb, the arrows, the spells, the frontline, and the priests' holy power…

Amidst all this, Hwang Jung-Yeon mumbled, "Go."

Countless items floated in the air. At a glance, there were dozens of them. It was safe to assume that she had brought out all the items she could use at once.

'The last phase?'

That thought popped into my head…

The countless items attached to her made strange noises as they activated one by one.

It was a sight that I couldn't quite describe or recognize.

It looked like they were monsters stuck in a narrow passageway during a monster wave.

A malicious wave made out of mana or some kind of transcendent power poured down.

The chaotic attack swept toward Rohen's rays of hope.

Kabooooooooooom!!!

Roooooooooooooooooooar!!!

To protect the main force, Jung Ha-Yan created a giant barrier, while the other mages helped maintain it.

William watched with gnashed teeth while Woo Hyo-Yeol walked toward the enemy.

'Haa… '

William watched as Woo Hyo-Yeol stepped forward. He had to have realized that he needed to go out there as well because he flinched, but I immediately said something to him.

"Hold your position."

William couldn't move, and he lost his chance to do so. Hesitating once was the reason Woo Hyo-Yeol was chosen and William wasn't. It probably wasn't because he was afraid of death. William had experienced death many times, and he had overcome them.

The reason he stopped and looked at them was that he was trying to find a

way to break through them. Obviously, that was impossible, as the sight before him exceeded the scenes he could ever imagine.

Obviously, this was the same for Woo Hyo-Yeol, but he was probably stronger than William.

I didn't notice anything. There was no information about where he needed to go and how to break through all of that. His so-called instincts and intuition were useless when confronted with such an overwhelming, chaotic attack.

Woo Hyo-Yeol's unique habit was the reason he stepped forward.

He disliked standing still, that was all. He needed to move and struggle. There was a reason he disliked losing and why he couldn't lose. Hesitating and staring at the massive wave of attacks wasn't really his style.

If something was blocking his path, he would swing his sword, and if there was something he couldn't break through, he would use magic.

He would grit his teeth whenever he thought he couldn't win, and he moved forward first instead of assessing the situation.

"Fuuuck!!!"

He was covered in blood, and his legs were paralyzed, so he couldn't move properly. Despite that, he forced himself to move forward. His poor physical condition and his excessive bleeding weren't any issues for him.

Just like when he fought Colonel Smith, he was evolving.

'Shit, is he part of some combat tribe or something?'

I started talking to him. I suggested a path that he could use to break through and a strategy that could help him win. I delivered information unknown to Woo Hyo-Yeol, and when I started seeing things that he couldn't see, his face became filled with joy.

“You… monster,” he mumbled.

Without a doubt, he was talking about me.

CHAPTER 1190
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (10)

One step forward and another step forward. The wall looked impenetrable, but that wasn't a problem. This dungeon was difficult, but the fact that he and I were connected, even for a brief moment, was enough.

One disappointing thing was the fact that our connection was really unstable.

'Our connection was carelessly made.'

If I had to give an example, it was like we were using a demo version. This was clearly the downgraded version of what I could use with Kim Hyun-Sung. I was supposed to feel everything our lovely regressor was feeling, but I couldn't feel anything from Woo Hyo-Yeol.

'The difference is too big… This is basically a knockoff version.'

I couldn't feel the heat of the battlefield, I couldn't feel the air brushing past his skin, and I couldn't use all of my five senses.

All I could rely on was his vision.

I saw whatever he saw and vice versa, but even *that* was a downgraded version. To be exact, Kim Hyun-Sung could *see* everything I was seeing. In Kim Hyun-Sung's words, his mind was being overwhelmed because he was seeing hundreds of points of view at once.

The fact that I had no telescope right now could be the problem, but the information he could process right now was extremely limited. Not only that…

'We can't even share our thoughts.'

If I were to compare our situation to a shonen manga, I'd say that our hearts weren't completely in sync, so of course, the Regressor Instruction Manual couldn't be used to the fullest. I couldn't help but think that if I weren't the real version, I was probably the downgraded version, but it sounded more reasonable to say that it was all because my bond with Woo Hyo-Yeol wasn't *that* deep just yet.

'With Kim Hyun-Sung, the manual was useful because we've spent several years together.'

I was seeing Woo Hyo-Yeol with the intention of using him temporarily and then throwing him away, so it wasn't strange that there was such a huge difference.

Of course, I couldn't just keep complaining.

'This is better than nothing.'

It was true that many things made me feel uncomfortable, but the fact that we still managed to connect was an achievement in itself. Also, Woo Hyo-Yeol's performance was so impressive that there was no need for me to complain out loud.

'At least it works.'

Even if he knew the effects of the items before him, it wasn't easy to break through them. To do something like that, one had to be strong enough, bold enough, and decisive enough.

Woo Hyo-Yeol's strength barely passed the benchmark. However, his biggest strength was his decisiveness. Every human being had even an ounce of hesitation in them, but he had none of that.

Despite the fact that hundreds of chains, which looked like they could easily tear somebody else apart, were falling before his eyes, his eyes were fixed on where I was staring.

'Left.'

Right…

The chains grazed Woo Hyo-Yeol's cheek, and despite seeing objects that could crush his head in an instant, he didn't even blink. Actually, he widened his eyes. His focus had reached its peak, and it was proven by how his pupils had constricted into pinpoints.

It seemed like he hadn't blinked even once since we started.

'Go up.'

When he stepped on the chains and went up, giant fireballs appeared before him. I was convinced that he could parry them, and I saw him swinging his sword at them.

Boom! Kaboom!

Upon vanquishing the firebox, he encountered the massive tsunami from earlier.

'It's called the Random Magic Box, but it looks like it only summons tsunamis.'

The problem was that many things were caught up in the tsunami, including the Infernal Magic Golem. The waves extinguished the flames, but the giant golem was swinging its fist haphazardly to swim.

It was the same for the gargoyle statues and the other beings summoned by the items. The way it consumed everything and created a hellish landscape was truly a spectacle. It felt like the time we entered Mirror Lake, but compared to back then…

'This is easy.'

Woo Hyo-Yeol continued his journey. He dodged the Infernal Magic Golem's fist, got on its head, and looked for a place to land. Of course, that was my

job, not his. After looking at everything he was seeing, I guided him and told him which place was weak, where he needed to step on, and what he needed to do.

"*Roooooooooar!*"

Kaboom!

A spider-type monster stretched out its leg as it was being swept away by the wave.

"Start."

Moving while dodging the monster's leg was the signal.

Woo Hyo-Yeol lowered his head and severed off the monster's leg. A giant spear flew toward him, but he dodged by leaning backward. It was only natural for him to dodge it because he was already aware of it. The spear was merely a distraction.

He was aware of the giant's foot, Chanelia Hermes's Battle Backpack, and the Infernal Magic Golem that stretched out its arm once more, but he didn't stop moving.

He would either block them with his sword or get away from them. He would sometimes let them collide into each other, reducing the effectiveness of the items. He was also aware that he needed to keep moving, and in response to that, I guided him.

It looked like a pile of trash was being swept in by the tsunami, but there was a path.

'How... does it look?'

I assumed that the path he needed to take was marked by a red arrow in his vision. His movements were just as decisive and precise. He didn't make any unnecessary movements, and his every action and movement seemed like he

was trying to carry out a side quest.

I was kind of surprised because I didn't expect him to agree to let me lead him so easily, but…

'He has no choice but to listen to me.'

I was letting him experience a brand new world, so of course, he wasn't going to let this opportunity go to waste out of pride. He knew better than anyone that there was a fundamental difference between this and his relentless attacks.

Moving while being fully aware of the battlefield was something warriors like him could only dream of doing, so I became a bit more confident.

"You're going to be kind of slow because of Ruten's Grand Clock," I warned him.

Ruten's Grand Clock was an artifact that could adjust the time within the affected region.

When Woo Hyo-Yeol stepped forward, everything slowed down. A mysterious hexagonal dice rolled around, and a snake made of lightning slithered in the air. Besides those, the pile of trash and fragments floating everywhere was swimming slowly as if the region had zero gravity.

Everything around him flew toward him.

As if time was sped up, everything fell toward Woo Hyo-Yeol, but all of that was part of the calculation as well.

Woo Hyo-Yeol split open the snake made of lightning, and the mysterious dice moved really far away.

Boom!

The dice devoured the nearby items and disappeared, so I adjusted the

location again.

'An opening.'

I saw a shortcut that was coincidentally made upon the collision of those items, not by me.

Woo Hyo-Yeol moved forward while swinging his sword.

Kabooooooooom!

"*Roooooooooar!*"

Booooooooooom!

Craaaack!

I had no idea what he was thinking right now, but he was definitely smiling.

"*Ha… haha*." He let out a dumbfounded laugh, which was unlike him. Then, he climbed up the mountain of items. When he reached an empty clearing, I saw Hwang Jung-Yeon looking at him with a blank expression.

Swoosh!

Woo Hyo-Yeol swept past Hwang Jung-Yeon.

"*Ah!*" Hwang Jung-Yeon gasped, and red liquid burst out of her.

Immediately afterward, we saw a tidy room that had remained unaffected by the chaos just now.

The players who had been swept away by the tsunami, the useless fools who had been watching the battle from afar, and the players actively participating in battle were staring at the unrealistic sight.

There wasn't enough time to figure out what was going on, but…

[The Collection Manager of the Demon King of Sunset's Demon Castle has been silenced.]

"*Waaaaaaaaaaah!*"

The people cheered.

"Don't think this is over… you lowly pests…"

'I thought you were silenced?'

The Collection Manager finally disappeared. I wasn't sure if she was recalled or if she was moved to a different location, but… I was really satisfied with what she had done.

The clichéd villain line that she had uttered before disappearing wasn't that bad.

"*Aaaaah!*" Woo Hyo-Yeol cheered.

William looked down at his hands.

'He looks sad.'

I was sure he was trying to figure out why he hesitated at the last moment, but what could he do? He had always been like that.

"We won… *ahh!* We won! We did it! Shit!!!"

"We did it in the end! This is what I'm talking about! *Hahahahaha!*"

'You guys didn't do anything. I did it. And you guys are too hyped up right now. People might think that we've taken down the Demon King of Sunset or something. Jung-Yeon was the only one we took down… '

If Hwang Jung-Yeon had intended to kill the players of Rohen, there wouldn't have been a lot of survivors. Whatever the reason, I had to strengthen the

stars of Rohen so that I could send them up the Demon's Castle, so they had no choice but to do things for me.

'Yeah… I can see why they're cheering… '

Just like the Forsaken Saint incident, they hugged each other and cheered in joy.

Obviously, I screamed in delight as well.

I was heartbroken because a few items were destroyed during the battle, but there were still many items left for us to take.

The fact that I had obtained the Magnetic Field Position Shifter was already great, but there was also Ruten's Grand Clock, which allowed me to freely adjust the time in a specific region.

The Ice Dust Clock allowed me to summon a chilling gust in a specific region as well.

Although one of them was destroyed, Clandas' Gargoyle still showcased its magnificent power. It was worth taking a look at all the items in the 10s. There were items we could take back to our continent and use, and not only that, Hwang Jung-Yeon knew the effects of those items, so we already had someone who could manage them.

'I'm so happy. I'm really, really happy.'

"…"

"That one looks good, and this one too.'

"Lee Ki-Young, you…" Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young…"

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young?"

Obviously, I couldn't express my joy right now because—

"Shit! Priest! Mr. Lee Ki-Young! Are you okay?!"

"*Kyaaaah!* Mr. Lee Ki-Young!"

—I was planning on dying.

'I'll collapse stylishly.'

Maintaining grace even as I was collapsing was what defined Flower Ki-Young.

Thud.

CHAPTER 1191
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (11)

Since I was going to act like I had fallen unconscious, I decided to actually fall asleep.

Truth be told, I was utterly exhausted. The schedule itself was quite grueling… I was drained after emitting the light… not to mention the quick conversation I had with Woo Hyo-Yeol.

My eyes were feeling heavy despite the loud noises, so I realized that my body had actually reached its limits.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young! Mr. Lee Ki-Young!"

"You… are you…"

"Priest! Come here right now!"

'Yeah, I was waiting for you guys to cheer.'

"*Ah!* Mr. Lee Ki-Young!"

'Your cheers were music to my ears.'

The way I staggered and collapsed had to have looked like something out of a painting.

It was a perfect angle and movement.

After staggering toward a location where everyone could see me, I grabbed my hand and fell to the ground. It was imperative that I fall in a way that would let them catch me so that I wouldn't hurt my head.

William, who was spacing out, snapped back to reality and caught me as I collapsed.

As expected, people looked at me from all directions.

It was like their cheer was signaling the climax of a solo concert. Even Woo Hyo-Yeol, who was famous for his poker face, couldn't hide his disbelief, so the reaction of the other people was easy to deduce.

'Everyone is panicking.'

"O-Oppa!" Jung Ha-Yan shouted.

I was worried about Jung Ha-Yan, but… I was sure she realized that there was nothing wrong with me. In other words, she wasn't panicking.

'Not only that… '

I had no idea why, but Jung Ha-Yan was one of the people who knew about the strange phenomena that were happening to me and Kim Hyun-Sung.

If I were a fake, it would be like breaking a treasured doll, but even if I were real, she would be notified before all this, so there was no need for me to worry about her reaction.

As expected, she approached me quickly and examined my condition. I was worried that she was going to drop a meteor on the Demon King of Sunset's Castle, but I was glad that she decided not to do something like that.

'Holy power… it's warm… '

Obviously, my holy power was draining away.

Lim Chae-Ryeong was crying, and I heard the furious William spitting out strange words.

"Shit! What have you people been doing all this time?! How did he… end up

like this?"

'Why are you so upset?'

It wasn't like him to yell at innocent people.

"Lee Ki-Young… Lee Ki-Young!" Woo Hyo-Yeol shouted.

To be honest, I wouldn't be surprised if I just died here.

If I were to die here, I'd be an enhancer for my comrades. My death would make them grow stronger, but these rookies looked like they still needed me.

Based on the lore, I had already exhausted my life force, but the gods' greed as well as my own will was keeping me bound to Rohen—this was a hidden part of my lore. Of course, I wasn't exactly aware of the complete truth.

"…"

"Mr… Ki-Young…"

"Hurry…"

"*Ah*… let go… of me!"

And as soon as I opened my eyes, I found myself on a comfortable bed.

'My condition is great.'

It seemed that they had decided to set up camp, and it was understandable, as they needed to take a break anyway. After arriving at the Demon King of Sunset's Castle, they fought about four named bosses, so this was the perfect time for a break. I had lost consciousness as well, so they had a good reason to take a break.

When I looked around in a daze, I heard voices outside.

"It's over?"

“They’ve already reached their limits. The next priest is—”

“There aren’t any more priests… What should we do?”

“Then we should bring in a backup healer. We have no other choice.”

“He’s showing no signs of waking up… and you want them to just use their holy power? He’s breathing… but he’s probably dead.”

‘Looks like I really slept as if I were dead.’

“Hey, shut up. What if Mr. William hears you?”

“Shit… I have my reasons. It’s because I’m frustrated, okay…”

‘You guys… were rotating the healers.’

They had no idea why I lost consciousness, but they believed using holy power on me would be effective.

‘What if holy power affected me negatively?’

“…”

‘Just as I expected, they’re so primitive.’

I saw magic circles on the ground and the walls. It seemed like they were used to amplify the healers’ holy power, but this was primitive as well. A sigh escaped my mouth, and it was because of their inefficiency.

I made a slight noise, and just as I expected, they immediately entered the room.

“Commander.”

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young?”

“He’s awake…”

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young… is awake… Hey, notify Mr. William right now.”

“No, there’s no need for that,” I told them.

‘I’m going outside anyway.’

“What?”

“I can move. I’m… okay now,” I reassured them.

“What do you mean? You shouldn’t be up, Commander. Mr. William ordered that you rest as much as possible—”

“I’m the commander and… I know my body better than anyone,” I interrupted them.

I would always say that line in a situation like this.

Few people would survive after saying those words, but that was exactly why it was meaningful. Naturally, I got up without a second thought. I heard noises outside, so I pushed the priests aside and headed outside…

‘What the?’

I saw the troops preparing to retreat.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young?”

“The commander has woken up.”

“Notify the others!”

‘Wait, what’s going on?’

Notifying others about me was one thing… but why were they preparing to go home? I slept like a log, so I couldn’t figure out what was going on, forcing me to ask the soldier nearest to me.

“Excuse me, what’s going on? And where’s the Flower and Fertility Familia…”

“The Flower and Fertility Familia are doing a pre-check on the retreat path-”

“What? Who made that decision…” I asked.

“When you were unconscious, Mr. William made that decision by himself. More importantly, you should be resting right now, sir. If you stay here…” the soldier said.

‘Forget about me resting, damn it.’

“I’m fine. I was just tired. Could you tell Mr. William to return right now? And Mr. Woo Hyo-Yeol…” I asked.

“I believe he went out with them,” the soldier answered.

‘They’re really taking this too far.’

“Now that I’m awake, I’m going to change the plan,” I announced.

I stumbled, and the soldiers rushed forward to support me. I wasn’t sure whether it was because they were impressed by my acting skills or because I looked really sick right now, but they were watching my every move.

I wanted them to do that, but I wouldn’t be happy if I was the reason behind their retreat.

“But—”

“I’m the commander of this expedition team. Do you need more reasons? Looks like you created a safe zone, so I’ll rest here for a bit. Also…” I paused.

“…”

“Where are the items?” I asked.

This was important.

“They’re stored separately—”

“I want to see them,” I interrupted them.

It could be the key for future raids, and I had to see who would be fit to use those items.

I was in pain, but I walked with a bolder stride than usual and with more confidence.

The people around me were anxious, as if they were taking care of a bird with broken bones, but my gait was so steady that it was hard to believe I had just gotten out of bed.

At least, that was what it looked like on the outside.

There were strange symptoms, like a pale face and uneven breathing. I looked fine to ordinary people, but for those sensitive to changes in people, they could easily see how unstable I was at the moment.

“*Whoo…*”

“Excuse me… Mr. Lee Ki-Young. I think you should rest—”

“I already told you… several times… that I’m fine,” I interrupted them.

“But—”

A loud voice echoed from the side. “Mr. Lee Ki-Young!”

“Sir!”

The people who gathered were none other than the members of the Flower and Fertility Familia. They looked like they had decided to run over here upon hearing the news.

“I’m glad you’re okay. *Whoo…* I’m really… really glad you’re okay…” one of

them muttered and grabbed my hand.

“What the hell are you doing?! Didn’t I tell you several times that Mr. Lee Ki-Young has to rest?!” William yelled.

William’s yelling made the innocent priests look around nervously.

The way they were getting yelled at made it look like it was my fault.

“You don’t need to yell at them, Mr William. I told them that I was fine,” I told him.

“There’s no need for you to be outside. Leave organizing the items… and the other tasks to us,” he said.

‘I’ll make a small remark.’

“Leave it to you? Leave what?” I asked.

“Pardon?”

“I-I don’t remember announcing the end of the raid. I don’t understand why you ordered the troops to retreat… Could you explain in a way I can understand?” I requested.

“We believed it was impossible to continue the raid. We didn’t know when you were going to wake up—”

“I was simply taking a break. It’s not something you should’ve decided so quickly. Do you not understand how many things are at stake in this expedition, Mr William?

“Do you even understand what kind of sacrifice we’ll have to make to return to this place—no, do you know how difficult it is to make all these troops go back?” I questioned.

“But…”

“There’s no retreat. Since a safe zone was created, everyone will rest here and we’ll resume the raid afterward. I’m certain you gave me full authority. We only retreat when our allied forces have sustained a near-annihilation level of damage,” I explained to him.

“…”

“Even in situations where I can’t communicate, you must follow the manual. The command center exists to follow that manual,” I added.

‘How dare you exercise authority?’

“That’s not the problem, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. I’m not sure if you’re aware, but it was determined that your condition was very critical…” William said.

“Excuse me?”

“If you’re with us, I’m sure we’ll get another chance. Please think about the future. Clearing the Demon King of Sunset’s Castle dungeon is important, and I also understand how important this expedition is for Rohen.

“However, we can’t… lose you just because of that,” William explained.

“Just because of what?” I questioned.

“Humanity will unite again as long as they have a reason to do so. You may not be happy about us retreating right now, but as long as we have you, I believe Rohen will be able to overcome this crisis again,” William said.

“…”

‘What the hell? You want me to go through this again?’

‘I’m not going to do this again even if they beat me to death.’

“Follow me,” I ordered.

At this point, I thought we needed to have a deeper conversation.

I took bold strides toward my sick room, and I saw William following me.

As soon as I sat on the bed, I saw him looking at me again while standing awkwardly.

He had to have realized that he had done something wrong because his gaze was darting around, but… he believed that he had made the correct choice. There was no need to hesitate or second-guess because, in the end, facts would decide everything.

“Mr. Lee Ki-Young, I ask you to reconsider. Rushing into the Demon King of Sunset’s Castle raid is—”

“I’m going to die soon,” I interrupted him.

“Excuse me?” William asked.

“I’m telling you that I don’t have much time left,” I clarified.

“…”

“…”

“W-What are you… saying right now?” William asked, frowning as if he couldn’t understand me—no, it was more like he didn’t want to understand me.

“I’m. Going. To. Die. Soon,” I said, enunciating each word slowly.

CHAPTER 1192
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (12)

It wasn't that I wanted to question William's decision. If I were in a life-or-death situation, then making the troops retreat would be a more reasonable decision. There would be some minor sacrifices during the retreat, but we could easily replace them by just looking at the bigger picture.

Unfortunately, no one…

'…can replace Lee Ki-Young.'

To put it a bit more extreme, even more than half of the troops couldn't compare to me.

If we use our resources to train troops like them by creating a training curriculum and supporting them with powerful items, then we could create those troops in just three to four years… Basically, they were tools that could be replaced at any time.

Basically, a genius like me couldn't be replaced. I was an angel who suddenly dropped from the heavens. It was thanks to my abilities that these hopeless savages of Rohen managed to reach the Demon King of Sunset's Castle.

In addition to overturning a system that was basically popular only during the Stone Age, I had also proven to them just how powerful a commander could be.

They had seen many shocking sights thanks to me, so I was sure my accomplishments had made an impact on these primitive Rohen humans.

They probably saw me as someone who had changed, saved, and advanced Rohen.

'So, how much longer are you going to take advantage of me?'

The problem was that I was running out of time. It was really sad news for William, who was reminded of the radiant golden light that I had brought to Rohen.

As expected, he looked devastated.

"Excuse me? I-I… don't really understand…" William said.

"…"

"Are you… really… I don't get… what you're saying…" William mumbled.

"…"

'Just accept it.'

"*Ha… haha…* You took the joke… a little too far," William said, chuckling hollowly.

I just looked at him quietly. He was looking at a man who had already accepted his death. It wouldn't take him long to realize that I wasn't joking because I was going to explain things to him.

"I'm not joking," I said.

"I'm sure… you're mistaken," William argued.

"…"

"If it's because of that being inside you… I'm sure we'll find a way to get rid of it. It's too early to come to that conclusion… How about we get you checked out or find a different way instead of staying here?" William suggested.

"…"

"As you already know, Rohen is vast. There may be powers we're not aware

of or other ways to treat your condition. No, I'm sure of it. This place—"

"It's not because of that. My life force is burning away even as we speak. I know that better than anyone, so there's no reason to make the troops retreat or give up on this expedition. No, we can't give up," I interrupted him.

"What you're saying is… nonsense. You keep… saying things I don't understand… You're still…" William muttered.

"You have to believe me," I told him.

"…"

"It's unclear, but I'm starting to see why I was summoned here, why they want me, what the being inside me is, and why it's inside me," I said.

"That can't be…" William mumbled.

"Even if I don't want to think about it… or understand it, I have to accept it. Like I told you earlier, my life force is burning even as we speak. The end is almost near," I added.

Pretending to be a saint destined for a tragic ending was easier than eating for me.

William was denying my words by saying that it couldn't be true or that he couldn't understand it. However, he couldn't ignore my resolute and composed face.

'It's actually a bit over the top.'

There was a being inside me capable of destroying the world… and now, he was being told that I was dying. Even I thought it was a bit excessive, but if there was someone who could support my argument, then it would be a different story.

And that was when Woo Hyo-Yeol entered the room quietly as if he had been

waiting for his moment.

I had no idea when he got here, but he was leaning on the wall with his arms crossed as if he were here from the start.

As expected, he chimed in while looking at William and me.

“How long do you have left?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked without any hesitation.

‘That put the nail in the coffin… ‘

William asked, “You’re aware… of it?”

Woo Hyo-Yeol didn’t answer.

“I asked how long you have left, Lee Ki-Young,” Woo Hyo-Yeol repeated.

“…”

“…”

“I’m not sure,” I answered.

“…”

“But I’m sure I’ll be able to hold out until the end of this expedition,” I added.

“…”

“Woo Hyo-Yeol… you knew about this?” William asked.

“…”

‘He’s confused.’

“So what?” Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

“You knew… and you didn’t say anything when he joined the expedition?!”

William yelled.

'He's upset.'

"It has nothing to do with you," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"Why did you do that? Why?" William asked.

"Do you need a reason?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"You—-"

"It's what Lee Ki-Young wanted," Woo Hyo-Yeol interrupted.

"…"

"He's the one who planned this expedition, and he also said that he's going to join. No one is in the position to tell him what to do," Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

This drama was fun.

"Did you know that he was on borrowed time?" William questioned.

"That's…"

"And did you know that he was losing his memories?" William added.

"…"

"This is the final decision he made on his own, so is there any reason not to respect it?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

I couldn't believe that Woo Hyo-Yeol was saying those lines.

'As expected, he's cold-hearted. My life force is slowly burning away, and it was exacerbated by the fact that I saved him.'

"Still!" William shouted.

“I don’t know the reason either. I don’t know… why he’s going this far. I’m not sure if he wants Rohen to remember that he was alive, or if he wants to do something for the idiots on this continent.

“I also don’t know whether he simply wants to make his final decision by himself. I don’t know any of that, as he keeps a lot of things to himself… but…” Woo Hyo-Yeol paused.

“…”

“That’s not a good enough reason to stop him,” Woo Hyo-Yeol continued.

William’s fist was shaking, and it was telling me that he was furious. He looked like an actor from a soap opera. I was bothered by Woo Hyo-Yeol’s extremely calm attitude, but at the same time, I wasn’t really bothered about it.

Why? It was all because Woo Hyo-Yeol clenched his fists, and he looked anxious, which told me that something was bothering him.

Even though he had basically said that he respected my final decision for myself, he looked more upset than anyone else.

“Yeah… that’s not a good enough reason to stop him. Even if there is a way to save him… can you guarantee that you can find a way to do so within the time limit? And are you sure that it will even save him?

“His soul is already rotting away… and his physical body has reached its limit. He has sacrificed many things to come here. Making all those sacrifices mean nothing is really an insult to him,” Woo Hyo-Yeol explained.

“That’s…”

“He has already decided,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“I-I can’t accept it. That’s—”

“You’re not getting it. It doesn’t matter whether you accept it or not, idiot,” Woo Hyo-Yeol interrupted him.

“People like you… will never understand it. A heartless person like you… don’t care about how others feel… You do whatever you want… and you only look at what’s in front of you…” William told him.

Woo Hyo-Yeol glared at William.

‘You’re right.’

Although Woo Hyo-Yeol hadn’t said it, his eyes seemed to be saying, *“Do you really think that I’m not being affected by this?”*

‘Really? Is that true?’

His eyes looked like they were expressing his fury, and I could feel that he felt really pathetic and resentful of himself for not being able to do anything about all this.

‘Is that how you truly feel?’

Blood was dripping from his clenched fist, and this was the most intimidating face I had seen of Woo Hyo-Yeol so far. He wasn’t being hostile toward William. It was more like he was furious for no reason.

It was probably just me, but it felt like he was taking out his anger on William.

William also glared at him, but he looked dumbfounded at the same time. He then bit his lips and stormed out of the room. I was kind of worried because his behavior reminded me a bit of Kim Hyun-Sung. His mind understood it, but his heart couldn’t accept it.

Of course, it was understandable. After all, he had just heard that the comrade with whom he had spent over five hundred regressions was dying of a terminal condition. Even an ordinary person wouldn’t be able to accept

something like that.

He already considered me a family member of the Flower and Fertility Familia, so I was sure that the news was particularly hard for him.

Lawful good—the fact that he was lawful good was somewhat reassuring, but people like him tended to become more troublesome upon breaking bad.

'I should comfort him.'

"Lee Ki-Young," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

Ah, what now?

"…"

"Is your loss of lifespan somehow connected to the fact that you saved me?" he asked.

"No," I answered.

"…"

"I simply told him that my life was burning away, so you don't have to worry," I added.

'Worry about it.'

"Helping and keeping you alive is my role," I reminded him.

'That's the saint's shocking ending… '

"As you said, I want to be faithful to my role. I want everyone to remember that… I once lived on this continent… and that a man named Lee Ki-Young once existed," I told him.

"Idiot. You're—"

“Even if I really disappear, I don’t want Rohen to forget about me,” I said.

‘Especially if I end up not being the real Lee Ki-Young.’

I staggered to show them that I was physically unwell.

“You…”

I stood firmly again as if I were fine. I breathed heavily and bent one knee slightly to show that I was having a hard time walking.

Woo Hyo-Yeol noticed and approached me, but I obviously wasn’t expecting help from him. As if to prove to everyone that I could still stand on my own, I grabbed my trembling knees and started walking away.

And that was when I saw our party members outside the room…

Nam Goong-Seon, Lim Chae-Ryeong, and No Dam-Hye.

“So you were listening,” I said.

“…”

“…”

Lim Chae-Ryeong was crying.

‘Now this is what I call peak melodrama.’

Nam Goong-Seon’s head was lowered, and No Dam-Hye’s eyes were already red.

“M-Mr. Lee Ki-Young… *heuk… heuuuk…*”

“*Sniff!*”

They were all crying. They were being a bit too emotional that I was getting kind of worried about them.

It seemed like Woo Hyo-Yeol had told them to come here. Perhaps he wanted to comfort me this way since he had no idea how to comfort me on his own, but the timing wasn't bad.

'It's about time they learn this. If it happens too abruptly, the emotional impact won't be that great.'

They even hugged me quietly.

It had been a while since I felt this kind of warmth, so it put me in a good mood.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young… I'm sorry. I'm really… really…"

'Yeah, yeah. But what are you apologizing for?'

"*Heuuuk*…"

'*Okay, okay. Stop crying, everyone.'*

"*Heuk… heuk.*"

'Pain helps you grow… and it makes you stronger, too.'

CHAPTER 1193
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (13)

The overall atmosphere of the expedition team was good. Not only did we defeat the three named beings in the underground area, but we even defeated Hwang Jung-Yeon, the Collection Manager, so it was not an exaggeration to say that the first half of the Demon King of Sunset's Castle had come to an end.

The named beings whom we would be facing in the future would be even more problematic to deal with, but the confidence gained by the expedition members had an overall positive impact on the expedition.

Like a hero born in troubled times, Woo Hyo-Yeol, who was nothing more than a leader of a small party, rose like a shining star, and he was so impactful that people started believing that we would be able to clear the Demon King of Sunset's Castle.

Of course, the most important thing was…

'The fact that I've regained consciousness.'

The genius commander who had descended upon Rohen like lightning from out of the blue, the Saint of Flower and Fertility, had awakened. We decided to take a well-deserved rest to comfort ourselves after the intense march, so it didn't take long for positivity to fill the air.

People weren't drinking or gambling, but they were resting, putting their guard down slightly. The best news was that a lot more people were fiddling with their status window and spending their coins.

The Demon King of Sunset's Castle was the best event, not only for me, but for the higher-ups as well, so people started using coins a lot more than

usual.

Moreover, the GENIUSES believed that we had a high chance of succeeding, so they distributed their savings to the allied troops, which was really good news.

“I should buy some items. Maybe…”

“Is there anything worth buying? With the coins that I have, I can probably only buy a few potions… *Huh?* Thank you, Ironclad Lion. I’ll put the coins you gave to good use.”

I could hear such words everywhere in the camp.

Due to the nature of the system, more and more GENIUSES were spending the funds of their familia for their people. It wasn’t my intention, but the time spent reassembling the troops and resting turned into an opportunity to collect coins.

‘GENIUSES are usually attention seekers.’

The GENIUSES knew that players often reacted badly when they donated coins during dangerous situations. Players couldn’t read their messages or give feedback during battle, so they were waiting for their contractor to have the time to reply to them.

Of course, I was no exception.

[The Goddess of Flower and Fertility♥ is apologizing to you. She mutters that she feels hopeless because there’s nothing she can do.]

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ yells out that they’ll disappear if you disappear. They cry out, saying that they can no longer spend this long time alone. They’re yelling out… saying it’s a lie and that you can’t disappear.]

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ donated 10,000 coins.]

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ donated 10,000 coins.]

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ donated 10,000 coins.]

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ donated 10,000 coins.]

'This GENIUS can use some professional help.'

[The Gatekeeper of Heaven♥ says that they'll find your soul no matter what, even if it means turning against the dimensional system. They swear that they'll protect you, even if it means going to war.]

'They are in a really bad condition. I remember them… being an anti-fan in the beginning… '

[Cluster of Stars Reflected in the Lake♥ is cheering for you quietly.]

[The Mistress of the Holy Night♥ says it's not easy for anyone to accept death. She's wondering how you can remain so calm and what makes you so strong. People sometimes show incredible resolve in the face of death, but you've gone beyond that.]

[The Mistress of the Holy Night♥ donated 50,000 coins to express her respect for you.]

[The Slender Tentacle Queen♥ was going to say something, but she decided to hold back.]

[The Slender Tentacle Queen♥ donated 100,000 coins.]

"You don't have to make donations like this…" I mumbled.

[The Song of Wine and Revelry donated 100,000 coins.]

[He Who Sits on the Golden Throne♥ says that you're a mortal worthy of receiving donations.]

[He Who Sits on the Golden Throne❤ donated 200,000 coins.]

“Thank you so much for your kind words,” I said.

‘It blew up the moment I went live.’

The flood of donations came in as if they had been waiting for it, and I was completely overwhelmed. Well, it was kind of expected.

When we started the Demon King of Sunset’s Castle raid, they were probably nervous. As soon as it was revealed that my life was running out, messages flooded in from the nervous and anxious GENIUSES.

William discovered the truth, Woo Hyo-Yeol held back his anger, and the party members comforted me. I knew better than anyone that these were selling points.

‘It’s nice that the atmosphere changed a bit.’

A dark shadow was cast on an atmosphere of brightness and hope. The dark shadow was directing everyone toward an uncertain but seemingly happy future. Unlike most of the people of Rohen, those who were within my inner circle were as cold as the northern duke in the novel everyone was talking about.

‘William is starting to become a threat… ‘

The party members wouldn’t stop crying. At this point, I started taking more breaks. I only worked for about four hours a day, and I spent the rest of my time in bed.

Whenever I was in front of the troops, I would greet them while walking confidently, but except for that, I would have people supporting me as I acted like I had a hard time walking on my own. My face was usually pale, and I wouldn’t stop coughing.

I was getting ready for my own death.

Of course, I spent my time talking to myself on the bed. In the slightly warm room where a candle or two were lit, it had become an unspoken rule for me to look at the ceiling for no reason and start talking as if someone else were around.

"Despite my flaws, I'm really thankful that you care for someone like me. It means a lot. All of you are the biggest blessing to me."

[…has donated 20,000 coins.]

[…has donated 40,000 coins.]

[…has donated 10,000 coins.]

'I need to get every last bit of coin from them.'

"I always tell you that you don't need to donate… but this time, I'll make sure to use the coins you donated wisely for Rohen and the Demon King of Sunset's Castle raid.

"*Ah*… your suggestion to look for other ways in the Coin Shop makes sense… but I don't want to use these coins for that. I also don't think there's a way," I said.

"…"

"Of course, if I escape the Demon King of Sunset's Castle and find myself at a peaceful place, then the process will slow down, but I don't think it's going to improve my condition.

"The last thing I want to do is close my eyes and achieve anything. I'm embarrassed to say this… but I want to have a somewhat honorable end," I added.

I started getting good questions.

[The Mistress of the Holy Night♥ asks how you're able to sacrifice everything

for Rohen.]

“Well, I’m not exactly sure why… but I have a feeling that this place will remember me,” I answered.

Yeah…

“I know that even if I disappear… Rohen will never forget that I was here and that I fought for this country and the people of Rohen,” I added.

[He Who Sits on the Golden Throne♥ says that people eventually forget everything. He doesn’t know if your sacrifice and achievements will be passed to generations, but bitterly says that Rohen will forget about you someday.]

“But…” I paused.

“…”

“All of you will remember me,” I argued.

“…”

“At least the land and the sea of Rohen… its wind and its stars… and all of you who have been watching over me will never forget me,” I said.

This kind of sentiment would always work on old-timers who liked that melancholic and nostalgic feeling.

“I know that I’ll be smiling as I look at Rohen once the Ashen Sunset fades, and I know that you… will always remember me. I won’t call myself a selfless person… but when I really think about it, all of you are the reason I managed to come this far,” I added.

[The Boy Adorned With Earrings of Truth is telling you to stop being ridiculous.]

‘I’ll ignore attention seekers like him.’

“That’s enough for me,” I said.

[…has donated 70,000 coins.]

[…has donated 110,000 coins.]

‘It’s really booming here.’

The amount of coins I had accumulated while resting over the past two days was twice as much as the time I fought those tentacles. I accumulated a massive amount of coins back then, so I couldn’t believe how much I had obtained over two days.

I smiled at the GENIUSES trying so hard to say something encouraging to me.

‘It’s been a while since I received this kind of attention.’

It was to the point that I considered doing this back on our continent.

On top of that, the GENIUSES weren’t the only ones who were being kind.

‘The people are even kinder.’

Woo Hyo-Yeol was especially kind. Although he wasn’t expressing his kindness through words, I could feel his kindness through his actions.

Knock, knock, knock.

“Come in,” I answered.

“Have you eaten?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

‘See? I told you.’

It was the typical greeting of a Korean man. Asking whether I had eaten or not was his way of saying he was worried about me.

“No, not yet…” I answered.

“Looks like you skipped again. Did you catch some kind of sickness that prevents you from eating until you die? The expedition is long. Eat all of this. Right now. In front of me,” Woo Hyo-Yeol ordered.

“But… I really—”

“Do I really need to shove the food in that small mouth of yours?” Woo Hyo-Yeol threatened.

“…”

“This won’t do,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“O- Okay! I’ll eat. I’ll eat…” I said.

‘This is actually really good. It just melts in my mouth.’

Obviously, the quality of the food had changed as well.

I usually ate a lot of good food, but food made with love was always unique.

“Have you talked to… Mr. William?” I asked.

“Not really. He doesn’t want me to get close to him. He’s the stubborn type who never lets go of something once he has made up his mind, so I’m sure he’s going to be like that for a while,” Woo Hyo-Yeol replied.

“*Ah…*”

“That idiot will understand it in the end. It’ll be hard to accept it… but he’ll know that you made the right choice,” Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

“…”

“How are the others doing?” I asked.

“Do you really need me to answer that? The kid is feeling guilty, saying she shouldn’t have convinced you to come out here…” Woo Hyo-Yeol answered.

“It’s really not because of that… and I explained it to her several times too…” I mumbled.

“If she were the type to listen to people, she wouldn’t end up in that situation. Don’t you agree?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“No. You always treat Miss Chae-Ryeong—”

“I’m right,” Woo Hyo-Yeol interrupted me.

‘But this jerk seems to have decided to watch me eat everything before he leaves.’

“Aren’t you going to eat, Mr. Hyo-Yeol?” I asked.

“I already ate,” Woo Hyo-Yeol answered.

“Let’s eat together next time,” I suggested.

He probably wouldn’t answer, but by tomorrow, he would visit me with his own food in hand.

‘It’s nice to be sick. Seriously. They’re treating me so well.’

Of course, I was bothered by the fact that he hadn’t apologized for his earlier comment, but I hoped that he would never apologize until my death.

Anyway, Woo Hyo-Yeol changed the topic.

“Also… did you hear the news?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“What news?” I asked.

“The rangers encountered the next named being,” Woo Hyo-Yeol replied.

“Who is it?” I asked.

“Yoo Ah-Young. She’s the Armory Manager of the Demon King of Sunset’s Castle,” Woo Hyo-Yeol answered.

“And the battle…” I asked.

“They haven’t fought her yet. Although I don’t know how much of that I should believe…” Woo Hyo-Yeol mumbled.

“I see.”

“Supposedly, she has no intention of fighting us. She actually sent a message, saying that she wanted to help us, even indirectly,” Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

I nodded upon hearing that.

‘This is… ‘

It seemed that Kim Ye-Ri had placed an easter egg in the dungeon. It was an event that would allow us to look through the items made by Yoo Ah-Young, the continent’s best blacksmith. Of course, I was sure that included visiting the 21st Legion’s warehouse.

“Do you believe it?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“I can’t say for sure, but… I can only hope what she said is true,” I answered.

We had to do this event no matter what.

CHAPTER 1194
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (14)

'It's better... '

It was better than I thought. The concept itself was bad, and I disliked the direction they were taking, but I was pretty satisfied with the structure of the Demon King of Sunset's Castle.

A horse running without taking any breaks would eventually collapse.

Although the troops were given a few days to rest, it wasn't enough for them to completely recover from exhaustion. Events like these, which often appeared in dungeons that would take a long time to clear, were huge boons for the expedition team.

They could obtain pieces of information needed to clear the dungeon, and the fact that we could obtain rewards pretty easily from this event meant that we were getting a lucky break.

Moreover, the Armory Manager was the one holding the event, and she was a named being who wouldn't do anything other than give out items, so I was definitely looking forward to this event.

'I'm sure the rewards will be good,' I thought, nodding to myself.

Woo Hyo-Yeol said, "Even if that's the case…"

"…"

"Do you really need to go yourself?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"Of course. She wanted to talk to the person in charge, right?" I asked back.

"…"

"I haven't completely let go of my doubts either, but unless something happens, I believe the Armory Manager is speaking the truth," I added.

"Do you have proof?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"Sane demons don't make compromises with humans. Isn't it pretty clear, just from how the Queen of Succubi has been acting the whole time and treating our expedition team like mere playthings?" I asked.

"…"

"She won't go out of her way to send a message like that just to set up a trap. The Collection Manager and the Black Butler's defeats are probably nothing more than entertainment to them. More importantly…" I trailed off.

"What?"

"It should be fine even if we end up in danger. We have you and the others, after all," I added.

'I'm right, aren't I? There's nothing to be scared of since we have the unstoppable Woo Hyo-Yeol.'

"Am I… wrong?" I asked.

"…"

"…"

"I don't think everything you said is right, but… it won't hurt to hear her out. Thinking about it again, I don't think they have a reason to do something this ridiculous," he answered.

"Hidden events and easter eggs are worth taking a risk. Once we're ready, we should go… It's better to check it out rather than sit here and do nothing," I

said.

"…"

"Please call the others. And… obviously, I think it's best if we implement security measures for this. Do you know anyone besides the ranger you mentioned earlier?" I asked.

"I'm sure William has heard the news as well… but I don't think we need to check," Woo Hyo-Yeol replied.

Woo Hyo-Yeol turned his attention to where William was located.

'Is he starting to become like Woo Hyo-Yeol?'

I was sure he expected me to make a move after hearing the news, and obviously, he hadn't come here to stop me. The previous incident made him realize that he couldn't stop the reckless Flower Ki-Young, so he was probably here to join me.

"*Ah!* Mr. William!" I greeted.

I carefully got up from the bed.

The sensitive Will saw that, and his eyes welled up with tears.

'I need to stay strong at times like this.'

He looked away, and the sight told me that he had no confidence to look me straight in the eye. He was bothered by the fact that my life was running out, and he had no idea how to treat me.

He acted as if he were never going to bend and compromise, but he looked as if he didn't want to argue about that right now. Either he had figured out that he wouldn't get the results that he wanted no matter what, or he was looking for another opportunity to convince me.

'Who would dare try to make me compromise?'

William looked like the recent incident hadn't happened as he said, "I'm here to deliver some news… but it looks like you already heard it."

"Are you talking about the encounter with the Armory Manager?" I asked.

"That's right," William answered.

"I was actually going to visit her myself," I told him.

"So in the end…"

"I didn't want to be the one to say this, but… we might need to negotiate… and it's not that I don't trust you or the command center. However…" I trailed off.

'You guys just aren't good at negotiating. I'm worried you guys will ruin the situation when things have been going so well.'

"You have a point, but… Mr. Lee Ki-Young… right now—"

"I know what you're worried about, but I'm fine. I've rested enough to stabilize my condition, so I want to start being active again. As you already know…" I trailed off.

'Trying to stop me won't work. Let's not make trouble for no reason at all.'

"I think it's best if we head to the armory warehouse, Mr. Hyo-Yeol," I suggested.

"…"

I decided to execute the plan without asking for William's opinion. As expected, William looked at me with a tinge of uncertainty. In the end, he took a deep breath, and I saw him sending a message to Emilia.

I was sure he was going to form a party to go to the warehouse with me.

Just like that, the key members of this expedition were recruited.

I had no idea what they heard, but the members, including William, looked as if they were ready to put their lives on the line. I was sure they were preparing themselves in case something happened.

Some of the members even ran out to check for any traps or anything

'I'm sure they're worried. After all, just because she contacted us first doesn't mean that we can trust her.'

Unlike me, who was aware that Kim Ye-Ri was controlling the situation from behind the scenes, the allied troops didn't know anything, so I understood why they were trying to be thorough.

In addition, they had never experienced an event like this, so it was only natural for them to overreact.

"The armory warehouse is located—"

"It's pretty close to the collection warehouse," I interrupted.

"Did you encounter any monsters or demons?" William asked.

"There were a few, but I believe the reconnaissance team handled them while clearing the path," a soldier answered.

'The reconnaissance team must be better than I expected.'

"I see."

The armory warehouse wasn't that far, and it resembled the collection warehouse.

Time went by quickly as I talked to William, Woo Hyo-Yeol, and Emilia about

many things.

A few members, including the reconnaissance team, were already inside, but William was being so cautious that he was walking slowly.

Soon, the warehouse appeared before my eyes.

'Wow.'

If the collection warehouse looked like a well-organized library, then the armory warehouse looked like an art gallery.

I saw items piled up in one place, but those were probably not that valuable, so there was no need for me to take a look at them.

To be honest, the massive forgery in the middle of the warehouse caught my attention. Calling this place a large forgery seemed better than calling it a warehouse.

The furnace was still burning, and I saw red molten metal within the furnace. I also saw hammers falling onto the anvil, creating clanking noises, but what bothered me was the temperature of the warehouse.

'It's really… hot.'

If this had been an actual battle rather than an event, we would have had to deal with the heat as well. While I was having these silly thoughts, Yoo Ah-Young appeared from behind the large anvil and hammer.

"It's nice to meet you. So… you're Miss Yoo Ah-Young…" I greeted.

"Yes, feel free to call me what's easy for you," Yoo Ah-Young said.

'It's kind of awkward.'

Yoo Ah-Young was covered in full-body armor, so I couldn't recognize her at first. She was also sporting a pair of horns. Moments later, she removed her

armor, and I believed it was because she wanted to show that she had no intentions of fighting the expedition team.

It was a pretty good decision since it helped us put our guard down.

“I don’t think this is the time for us to talk leisurely,” Yoo Ah-Young said.

“…”

“I’m sure you’re curious about why I sent those messages. I’m sure you’re also wondering if you can really trust me,” Yoo Ah-Young added.

“That’s right,” I answered.

“The fact that you’re here means that you trust me a bit, but…” Yoo Ah-Young trailed off.

“…”

“I was actually waiting for people like you to visit me,” she added.

‘I knew they were going to go in that direction.’

I had an idea as to what was going to happen.

‘You were dragged here against your will or something like that, right?’

“I’m actually not part of the 21st Legion,” Yoo Ah-Young said, revealing her lore.

She wasn’t part of the 21st Legion, and she was probably a blacksmith peacefully making weapons somewhere. However, she caught the legion’s attention, and from that moment on, she was forced to keep making weapons for them.

She was acknowledged for her skills, which put her in her current position, but a part of her missed her hometown.

“It was a very peaceful place, but…” Yoo Ah-Young trailed off.

Obviously, she couldn’t go back home. It was highly likely that the Demon King of Sunset had already taken over her hometown.

‘Still, shouldn’t she come up with another reason about why she had to stay here?’

I felt like she heard me because she started talking about that.

“I’ll get straight to the point, I would like you to rescue my husband. He is currently locked up in the underground prison,” Yoo Ah-Young requested.

‘I was wondering why I still haven’t seen Chang-Ryeol. Anyway, you guys aren’t married, right?’

Her story and acting fell short compared to the overall setup, and it felt like she was trying too hard to make the puzzle pieces fit. Her voice sounded robotic as if she were reading from a script. Yoo Ah-Young usually wouldn’t get nervous, so the fact that she was so nervous before me made me realize that she had no talent for acting.

“If you fulfill my request, I’ll give you a satisfactory reward,” she offered.

“Is there any reason we should go out of our way to fulfill your request?” Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

“Mr. Hyo-Yeol,” I said.

“Even if you decide to hunt me, you won’t be able to use the equipment here. The 21st Legion’s items are too dangerous for mortals like you to use… and the only one who can alter those items so that you can equip them… is me.

“That reason should be good enough…” Yoo Ah-Young answered.

“How absurd,” Woo Hyo-Yeol commented.

I felt like I had to help out a bit.

“It’s true, Mr. Hyo-Yeol,” I said.

“What?”

“The items here are cursed, and there are penalties upon using them. You and Mr. William are strong enough to endure the penalty, but that’s not the case for the others,” I told him.

“…”

“…”

“Do you have proof that you’re not lying?” I asked.

“I don’t and it’s up to you whether you want to trust me or not, but… I’m not the type of person to lie about such things. Please…” she begged.

“…”

“Please save my husband,” she requested.

Yoo Ah-Young bowed slowly and then… a heavy silence filled the room. Who could have imagined that a demon would bow willingly toward mere humans?

At this point, I was sure everyone realized that Yoo Ah-Young wasn’t lying, but understanding that and trusting her was a completely different story.

Before considering the pros and cons, trusting a possible enemy in the middle of hostile territory was never an easy decision.

Had I not been here, they would have missed out on this event.

The slightly nervous Armory Manager looked gloomy.

I turned to William and Woo Hyo-Yeol.

“We have to trust her.”

“Why is that?” Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

‘What do you mean why? Your weapon was destroyed, and we need to find another weapon for you to use. There’s already a difference in level, so if your equipment is bad, we’re doomed. Do you really think the Regressor Instruction Manual is all-powerful?’

“…”

‘This event is basically free items, and we don’t need to mobilize all our troops to complete it. We just need to form a small squad and save one person from prison… It’s not like we’re fighting a named being… ‘

At the very least, I wasn’t going to go help them with the event.

I was planning on sprawling out on the bed and watching something with some food.

“I asked why we should trust her, Lee Ki-Young. If it’s because of your pathetic sympathy—”

“I don’t want to ignore the truth. That’s all,” I interrupted him.

This was probably not the case for William, but it was difficult for Woo Hyo-Yeol to trust someone for no reason at all. Woo Hyo-Yeol looked stern for some reason, but I remained unfazed as I replied, “I’m—no, it’s because… we’re humans.”

CHAPTER 1195
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (15)

A strange sentence was thrown out for no reason at all. I wouldn't have anything to say if someone said that I was talking nonsense, but sadly, no one here could say that to me.

'This is why having a position of power is important.'

The speaker was the saint willing to throw away his life as if it were nothing, all for the sake of Rohen and mankind. Even if I suggested something ridiculous, like using dog poop as medicine, they would surely think that there was some kind of special meaning behind it.

I glanced at William to see his reaction, and I saw that he was contemplating something. Then, he nodded without realizing it.

It was the same for Woo Hyo-Yeol.

"How absurd…" Woo Hyo-Yeol remarked. Despite saying that, it was hard for him to ignore the strange glimmer in my eyes.

For some reason, he fell into deep contemplation. Perhaps he needed to think a little more about trust, faith, and the truth. It was possible he was thinking about how the Saint of Flower and Fertility could trust others without even a hint of suspicion.

This was impossible for Woo Hyo-Yeol, who never really trusted humans.

"It's so ridiculous… that I can't even laugh about it. If it sounds even a bit reasonable, then it would be convincing, but—"

"I have a logical explanation. I already told you, Mr. Hyo-Yeol. However, I feel like we should go beyond that and trust her. It's not simply because I pity her

or that we should just help her…" I interrupted him.

"…"

"I feel like we should trust her. I can't really explain this feeling, but…" I trailed off.

'We met someone important.'

It was random, but this could be considered a test that involved trusting her or not.

The person who designed the dungeon believed in the inherent kindness of people, so these events often stood out more than the others. The concept of receiving unexpected rewards for good deeds was always a favorite choice among players.

Although this was kind of different, the framework was the same.

We would receive a reward by trusting the Armory Manager.

"If that's what you wish, Mr. Lee Ki-Young…" William said.

My job was to simply convey that there was *something* here.

I looked around again, and no one seemed to be objecting to it, so I turned to Yoo Ah-Young, who was staring at me.

"We accept your offer," I said.

"Thank you," Yoo Ah-Young said.

"Before that… I would like to clarify that we haven't accepted your offer simply to be kind toward you. As you mentioned earlier… we would like you to alter the items here so that we can use them," I requested.

"Of course," Yoo Ah-Young answered.

“Please do it now. The people here, especially those two… they all need decent equipment…” I added, pointing at William and Woo Hyo-Yeol.

Yoo Ah-Young nodded.

‘Maybe not so much for Will… ‘

However, Woo Hyo-Yeol’s equipment issue was an urgent matter. I couldn’t make him keep using Lim Chae-Ryeong’s dagger. He wasn’t like Kim Hyun-Sung, who took care of his equipment, so of course, his equipment never lasted long.

Actually, I was impressed that his equipment hadn’t shattered until the recent battle.

Anyway, we needed to replace his equipment as soon as possible. Despite the fact that he was grumbling earlier, he still looked delighted when I told him that I was going to replace his items.

I noticed him quietly moving away from the party and looking at the weapons.

‘But it’s not really—’

“…”

‘Silpia’s Claw?’

Why was he even looking at that?

Woo Hyo-Yeol reached his hand out toward the weapon upon making up his mind.

“That’s not the one,” I told him.

“What?”

“I think it’s best if I choose a weapon for you,” I suggested.

“What are you saying all of a sudden…” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“It’s not a bad choice, but I don’t think it fits you, Mr. Hyo-Yeol. I can guess what you’re going after, but… I think this might be better for you,” I said.

“You know nothing…” Woo Hyo-Yeol mumbled.

“You’re probably after the Wind’s Blessing on Silpia’s Claw… but Agility isn’t your strong point. It’s your explosive, burst power. You seem to be thinking that you’re fast… but you’re definitely not fast at all,” I said, pointing out his flaws.

‘You’re a turtle compared to Hyun-Sung.’

‘And don’t even get me started on Will… ‘

“What did you just say?” Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

“Vampiric Blade. This fits you better. As you can already tell by the name, it’s a sword that allows you to absorb the damage you inflict on enemies as HP. Think about what I just said and tell me which stat do you think brings out your strengths?” I asked.

“…”

“I don’t know exactly what your stats are, but I believe you’re currently performing beyond the limits of your Agility and Strength. And your Stamina is what’s helping you perform beyond your limits,” I told him.

“…”

“You get tired easily, right?” I asked.

“Stop being ridiculous. You really think I easily get tired?” Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

“You push yourself hard by yourself, so it’s only natural for you to easily get tired. I know you’re trying not to show it by enduring it, but I can tell from your face. And once you’ve reached a certain limit, you try to overcome it with sheer willpower,” I added.

“You don’t know anything about me,” Woo Hyo-Yeol commented.

“It’s good to have strong willpower, but how long are you going to rely on that? I just wanted to tell you that your fighting style depends too much on luck.

“Anyway, this is the reason why you must go for Stamina instead of Agility. That’s what I think. No, I’m definitely correct. Your other gear should have the same stats as well,” I suggested.

‘He’s frowning because I’m spitting facts.’

“Your confidence at the very beginning of a fight must be maintained until the very end of the battle. That’s the kind of style you should aim for, Mr. Hyo-Yeol,” I explained.

‘I think I hurt his pride a bit… Should I have sugar-coated it a bit?’

“…”

I was sure he was really eager to become stronger, so he would probably listen to me.

As expected, he examined the Vampiric Blade. He seemed to be contemplating it, but I was sure he was aware of his issues as well. He wasn’t acknowledging it simply because he didn’t want to admit it, but I was sure that he couldn’t ignore my words.

“Can you alter these weapons, Miss Yoo Ah-Young?” I asked.

“Yes, of course, sub guild—I mean, Mr. Lee Ki-Young,” Yoo Ah-Young answered.

'Please focus.'

"Also…"

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young, could you help me as well?" William asked.

'Let's see… for you… '

"I think you picked out the right one, Mr. William," I said.

"*Ah…* really?" William asked.

"Yes. You're clearly aware of your strengths and weaknesses…" I answered.

'Everyone looks excited.'

Of course, they wouldn't obtain the items right away, but there wasn't a player alive who disliked getting stronger. This was especially true in dungeons like this, where increasing one's stats was very important.

Each and every item was extremely valuable to them.

"Please start working on them right away. We'll start the rescue operation right afterward," I requested.

"Okay."

"Is there anything we should know or be cautious about?" I asked.

"It shouldn't be that difficult. The 21st Legion is currently in a bad situation… You might need to watch out for Schofield, the warden of the underground prison… but you managed to defeat the Black Butler and the Beast Tamer…" Yoo Ah-Young trailed off.

'Looks like they brought in an extra.'

Besides that, I heard a variety of information from her. First of all, she couldn't go there because she was the Armory Manager, which was why she

tasked us to go.

The guards guarding the prison were a lot weaker than the named beings. We also learned the overall abilities of Warden Schofield and Lee Chang-Ryeol's appearance. I was sure all these pieces of information would help us in the operation.

The quest was so easy that it could be labeled as a side quest, and it wouldn't really matter whether we got this quest or not.

'I think the other members should take care of this.'

Emilia and the other members of the Flower and Fertility Familia ought to deal with this.

'And I can just give them the overall instructions about the operation… '

We also needed to level up the other players since they would support our key players—Woo Hyo-Yeol and William. It'd be hard for them to match how quickly those two were getting stronger, but they had to grow strong enough to keep up to them.

"I'm sorry for burdening you, Miss Emilia," I said.

"It's okay, Saint Lee Ki-Young," Emilia said.

I hugged her to comfort her.

"…"

I had to have hugged her a bit too hard because Emilia blushed.

After smiling at her, I hugged the others as well.

"I'd like to go with you, but…"

"Giving us instructions about the operation from afar is more than enough,

so you don't have to worry. It's just… we feel bad because we have no choice but to receive help from you," Emilia said.

I honestly didn't want to go, and I wished I could have some time to recharge a bit.

"If something happens, I'll contact you."

"Okay," I said.

Woo Hyo-Yeol seemed to be deep in thought.

I was worried that my comment about how he lacked stamina had shattered his sensitive heart, but this was different from that.

'He probably won't say anything ridiculous like not liking the equipment when I had already picked them out for him, right?'

That wasn't the case either, and he was also aware that this side quest was going to be beneficial for the allied troops.

I believed he was captivated by Yoo Ah-Young altering the equipment in the forge, and it wasn't really a surprise. He had probably seen many blacksmiths and equipment before, so I was sure he knew how skilled she was at the forge.

Of course, the quality of the items that the 21st Legion had collected so far was readily apparent to him.

'What are you staring at all of a sudden?'

"What are you unhappy about now?" I asked.

"It's nothing like that," Woo Hyo-Yeol replied.

"I mean… you even got some good items…" I said.

“That’s the problem. Things are working out better than I expected,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“What?”

He looked slightly awkward. I couldn’t quite describe how he looked, but he looked like he was trying to understand the situation as best as he could.

I was talking about the fact that I said that we were humans as well as the positive outcome that we managed to achieve through kindness and trust. I was sure these were confusing to him.

The storytelling was going so smoothly that he was questioning whether all of this was scripted or not. I was sure that it was hard for him to believe it. After all, this was the result of unconditional trust.

‘Makes sense.’

In this past life, he wandered alone like an abandoned wild dog. It was also highly likely that he hadn’t experienced even a taste of romance. After all, I wasn’t present in his past life. He probably saw people stabbing each other in the back and people fighting like wild beasts.

The things he had experienced so far in this second life of his were things he couldn’t really understand. Having comrades and meeting someone willing to risk his life for them, even though they hadn’t known each other for a long time…

‘Grandpa Bolt.’

He also met someone who loved, loved, and loved everything about Rohen.

He was slowly realizing it, and I had a feeling that my abrupt words about how we were humans were gradually changing what he considered common sense.

Just then, Woo Hyo-Yeol suddenly asked, “What do you think about me?”

“What are you saying all of a sudden?” I asked.

“Do you trust me?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“…”

“Even if I tell you that I’m hiding something from you?” he asked.

“…”

I finally became certain that his mindset had changed.

‘You jerk… are you ready to do that?’

CHAPTER 1196
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (16)

"Even if I tell you that I'm hiding something from you?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"…"

"…"

The answer was obvious.

"I trust you," I answered.

"What?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"I trust you. Isn't it obvious? Otherwise, we wouldn't be here together," I said.

"…"

"Also, you don't need to hint at me that you have some kind of secret because I know you have secrets. Everyone has a secret or two, and hiding secrets doesn't necessarily mean that there's a reason for me not to trust you," I explained.

"…"

"From what I've seen… you're an asshole when you're straightforward…" I said.

"What did you just say?" Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

"You're terrible when dealing with people… and you do have some… character issues… but I have an idea now," I said.

"…"

"I know that you're not *that* bad of a person, Mr. Hyo-Yeol," I added.

"What kind of ridiculous things are you going to say this time…" Woo Hyo-Yeol mumbled.

"I'm being honest. You're more warm-hearted than you think, Mr. Hyo-Yeol. You don't talk much because you're being considerate of others… and you get upset easily because you're an emotional person," I continued.

"…"

"I'm sure I'm not the only one who feels that way," I said.

'For example, there's Lim Chae-Ryeong.'

"I'd bet everything that I have that everyone trusts you, Mr. Hyo-Yeol," I told him.

A strange expression appeared on his face. Well, to be exact, it was more like he felt awkward about this situation. It was a natural reaction from him because no one would say such words to his face.

Of course, I felt like everyone would feel embarrassed to hear cheesy words like, "You're warm-hearted, emotional, and trustworthy" from just about anyone.

I said those cheesy lines with a face full of sincerity, so of course, he'd be embarrassed. He seemed to regret asking that question. It was pretty obvious how he was going to react since he had a defense mechanism.

"I didn't ask because I wanted to hear any compliments, you idiot."

'I knew it.'

Not only that, he seemed anxious, as if he wanted to get out of this situation.

I feltl ike he was struggling to endure the heartwarming atmosphere, and I could sense that he wanted to get out of here.

“Did that answer your question?” I asked.

“*Hmph*.”

After that, he walked away. He still wasn’t a sociable person, and he seemed to be deep in thought.

‘This jerk… maybe he really is ready.’

It varied depending on the individual.

Unlike Kim Hyun-Sung, who confessed that he was a regressor in an apologetic way, I felt like Woo Hyo-Yeol thought that his regressor status wasn’t really a big deal.

Of course, Kim Hyun-Sung hid that truth for a long time, and because our bond was growing stronger, he was worried about looking like he had approached me intentionally and ended up panicking about it, but that wasn’t the case for Woo Hyo-Yeol.

From the start, I knew he was keeping something from me, so basically, we both had secrets.

‘There’s probably a difference in personality as well.’

Woo Hyo-Yeol seemed to be able to take everything lightly, so he was completely different from Kim Hyun-Sung, who would panic over the most trivial things.

What surprised me a bit was that… it was too fast. Although trust, faith, and that line had contributed significantly to this outcome, I was still surprised to see him react so quickly.

The thing was that I wasn’t trying to get a reaction out of him.

'I really can't figure him out.'

No matter how much I thought about it, he had always been hard to understand, but of course, that was good news for me.

'I wonder if our synchronization rate with the Regressor Instruction Manual is going to increase even just a bit.'

Our bond was what was important.

I coughed once and immediately heard William's voice.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young…"

"Yes?" I answered.

"This side… I mean, I think it's best if you head inside for now. I'll take care of the basic onsite coordination. I'll follow the manual you created, and if there are any variables, I'll be sure to contact you right away," William suggested.

"But… *cough, cough…*"

"Today isn't the only day. If you want to clear the dungeon until the end, I think it's best if you take a break," William said.

Normally, I wouldn't give in, but…

"Okay. I think it's best to do that," I agreed.

It was the right move for now.

'At this point, it's best to increase the tempo.'

I would probably never get this chance again. I had a feeling that he would soon reveal that he was a regressor, but it was too soon to be careless.

He seemed like he was going to confess now, but once he went into hiding, who could say how long it would take for him to confess? The time we can

spend together was short in the first place, so it was better to do this fast.

'I should set the mood.'

First of all, gathering the party members was a great start.

Ignoring Yoo Ah-Young, who couldn't stop glancing at me, I returned to the camp and called the party members. Rather than a room, we had to be outdoors so that I could forcefully bring out our memories.

The location itself wasn't a problem. We just had to be somewhere without anyone else. Fortunately, we were inside a dungeon so that wasn't really hard to do. Will was also being considerate so that I could rest comfortably.

'I should set up a campfire.'

It didn't really matter whether we had a campfire or not, but it would be helpful to build the mood.

I also decided to prepare some blankets…

'And some food.'

Rather than using my coins to buy expensive food, I decided to get the adventurer's set meal that we often ate with Raymond Bolt. The hearty meat stew tasted like Raymond Bolt had made it himself, and it was pretty popular among us.

The twenty-three-year-old Flower Ki-Young liked it, but not Lee Ki-Young.

'We can light candles and have an honest conversation.'

"*Ah!* You even cooked? Mr. Lee Ki-Young!" someone exclaimed.

"I just… wanted to treat everyone," I said.

"You're not even feeling well… I knew this was going to happen. Sit down. I'll

take care of everything. I've memorized his recipe. *Ah!* Hold on. I brought *that*," Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

"What?"

"Our utensils. I forgot to clean them and brought them just as they were, but it's a good thing I brought them. *Heh…* Grandpa's food tastes better when served here than on a ration tray," she answered.

'No, it's so dirty.'

"Sit down, sir. You're in no condition to move…" No Dam-Hye suggested.

"No, I'm fine, Miss Dam-Hye. I'm almost fully recovered…" I told her.

"But still…"

Nam Goong-Seon, Lim Chae-Ryeong, and No Dam-Hye came right on time when I was starting to feel exhausted.

The three of them chattered around me.

"Did Miss Jung Ha-Yan go on a mission with that woman named Han Sora…?" Nam Goong-Seon asked.

"Yes," I answered.

To be exact, I had no choice but to send her away. Her task was to break the barrier to the Cursed Elf Queen Elena's indoor garden.

"She's working hard when everyone is resting," Nam Goong-Seon said.

'Probably not.'

It looked pretty fun. It actually looked like it was designed so that solving the puzzle would be fun, even based on Jung Ha-Yan's standard.

It was the barrier that Han Sora had discovered while dealing with the

Gladiator of the Underground Arena, so I was sure she felt motivated to do some more.

The part I was kind of confused about was the identity of the puzzle's designer. I couldn't believe that they managed to create a puzzle that even Jung Ha-Yan would have fun playing it, but…

'I'm sure it was Ji-Hye noona.'

She was probably busy pretending to be Dominions, but she *did* say that she had prepared everything. For a moment, I felt like I was overlooking things, but at the moment, it was meaningless to think about it.

I promised myself to resolve the problems that were right in front of me first before anything else.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young… are you feeling uncomfortable?" Nam Goong-Seon asked.

"No, I was just thinking about something…" I answered.

"Would it be alright if I examined your body?" Nam Goong-Seon asked.

"I'm really fine, Miss Nam Goong-Seon," I reassured her.

"But…"

"Really, and you already know that nothing will really change… It's not because I don't trust your abilities…" I told her.

'Ah… '

I ruined the mood. The three girls who were trying to be happy now looked gloomy.

I had basically ruined their efforts.

'Ah… this is bad.'

No Dam-Hye was already crying, so I tried to remain calm, but I had a feeling that it was going to make things worse. I gulped out of nervousness and heard a certain someone.

“You’ll be fine for now,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“…”

‘Hyo-Yeol.’

“Seeing that you took it upon yourself to cook, you must be in good condition,” Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

“*Ah,* why are you always talking that way?! There’s seriously something wrong with you,” Lim Chae-Ryeong complained.

“*Hmph.*”

“You’re always doing that whenever you have nothing to say,” Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

“It’s not that I don’t have anything to say. It’s more like I don’t see the need to keep talking to you, kid,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“You say that, but you talk a lot,” Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

“*Hmph.*”

“Do you two… have to fight on a day like this?” Nam Goong-Seon questioned.

“Unni, look at how Hyo-Yeol oppa is acting. How can I not act this way?!” Lim Chae-Ryeong shouted.

“Is today a special day?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“It’s been a while since we gathered and ate together like this. It’s very meaningful to me,” I answered.

Actually, it hadn't been *that* long since we last saw each other. Before leaving for the expedition, I forcefully made time so that we could all hang out together. Perhaps this moment felt even more special because we had just experienced a pretty fierce march.

All the party members seemed pretty satisfied with it as well.

"Take some more meat, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. Hyo-Yeol oppa said he doesn't like meat," Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

"*Haa…"* Woo Hyo-Yeol sighed.

They were arguing over the pieces of meat in the stew. As always, we talked about many different things. Of course, we also talked about work.

"How's the item you got, Miss No Dam-Hye?" I asked.

"*Ah!* I think it's really good. Stielike's Violin… I never imagined I would be the one to use it," No Dam-Hye answered.

"It's a good item, so I'm sure it'll be helpful, and it fits you as well," I said.

"But, sir, when are we leaving again?" No Dam-Hye asked.

'We'll probably leave once Emilia's party finishes the sub-quest.'

Flower Ki-Young knew when to rest and have fun, so he enjoyed the thrill of small indulgences like this.

"Does anyone want… some rum?" I offered.

"*Ahh!* Are we allowed to drink it? This is against military discipline…" Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

"I'm drinking it secretly. I like acting like this from time to time," I said.

"Sir!"

“You can’t drink this, Mr. Lee Ki-Young.”

In some ways, I was building the mood. I wasn’t really a fan of using alcohol to build the mood, and I also wouldn’t recommend it, but it would always loosen up just about anyone.

Woo Hyo-Yeol probably thought that there was no reason for him to decline, and I saw him drink one cup after another.

As for the others…

“*Heuk… heuuung…* don’t die… *heuuuuuuuung*… You can’t die, Mr. Lee Ki-Young!”

“You said you would sing with us, sir… *hiccup…* No take backs.”

“*Whoo…*”

How are you three drunk when Woo Hyo-Yeol is still sober?

“This is why I tried to stop the kid… Damn it… I can’t believe she drank until she got drunk… She’s such a handful…” Woo Hyo-Yeol complained.

The three party members were asleep.

Lim Chae-Ryeong was rolling around, drunk, while Nam Goong-Seon was mumbling something to herself. It sounded like a prayer.

I could hear violin noises from nearby, so I believed No Dam-Hye had to have decided to start a small concert in her own room.

‘The mood isn’t so bad.’

The campfire was crackling, and Woo Hyo-Yeol was tipsy. It was funny, but he wasn’t annoying when he was tipsy. There was faint background music in the background.

The conversations were successful, so I believed that I could slowly make him open up until he revealed his secret by himself.

“So… Mr. Hyo-Yeol…” I said.

Woo Hyo-Yeol suddenly got up and said, “I’m going to head in first. It’s pretty late.”

‘Wait, you can’t just leave.’

“Lee Ki-Young…” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

“Yes?”

“…”

“…”

“I’m a regressor,” he confessed.

‘What?’

“…”

‘Wait, now that you said it just like that… what am I supposed to do?’

Woo Hyo-Yeol turned around and walked away.

‘Wait, you need to hear my answer first.’

Seemingly refusing to hear any feedback or comments, the idiot walked away.

CHAPTER 1197
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (17)

'What the hell does that jerk want me to do?'

It was such a baffling hit-and-run that I couldn't understand his intentions at all. I knew he lacked communication skills, but I couldn't help but think it was worse than I thought.

'What was I supposed to do when you left just like that… '

Naturally, I recalled his behavior last night.

I shouted, "What?" and tried to grab him, but the lonely march of the embodiment of pride was unstoppable. He walked so fast that he literally disappeared in the blink of an eye. No matter how hard I thought about it, his actions were beyond his normal behavior, so it was really shocking.

That was not all.

What was even more absurd than last night was—

'This jerk is seriously… '

—the fact that he pretended like nothing had happened the next day.

"Is there something on my face?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

'No, you jerk.'

"*Hmph.*"

'What on earth is wrong with him?'

'What is causing Woo Hyo-Yeol to turn into a monster obsessed with pride?'

I woke up a little earlier than usual and ate breakfast. Normally, I would wake up a bit late and eat a light meal on my own, but everyone ended up gathering in the morning thanks to the influence of last night's events.

Some were suffering from a hangover, so Nam Goong-Seon cast a spell to help them feel better, but despite that, No Dam-Hye and Lim Chae-Ryeong still didn't look so good.

"*Ack…* I think I drank way too much. I shouldn't have done that… If something happens…" Lim Chae-Ryeong mumbled.

"I'm… kind of worried as well. I shouldn't have done that…" I said.

"You shouldn't say that, Mr. Lee Ki-Young. It already happened… so it's not good to regret it. Think of it as a small escape after a long time and just enjoy it. Anyway, those who have done rebellious things before do it better… You were the type who only studied even back on Earth, right?" Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

"*Ah*… well, yes…" I answered.

"I'm sure all you did was study… You seem like that type of person," Lim Chae-Ryeong said.

"*Haha…"* I laughed.

"Living too strictly is bad. You need to have events like last night to refresh and improve your work efficiency. Sometimes, you need to postpone today's work and do it tomorrow," Lim Chae-Ryeong continued.

"Don't act like you're an expert at becoming a piece of trash, kid," Woo Hyo-Yeol chimed in.

"*Ah…* are you serious, Hyo-Yeol oppa?!" Lim Chae-Ryeong yelled.

Woo Hyo-Yeol was the only person who looked fine, and perhaps he couldn't remember what had happened last night, as he was bantering with Lim Chae-Ryeong as usual.

Even when I stared at him, his expression remained unchanged.

Instead, he looked at me straight with a sense of superiority. I even thought…

'Is he Dumb Hyo-Yeol?'

Was he thinking the same thing? Was he drunk last night? Had something else happened last night? Or had he erased the things he said last night from his mind?

I looked at him using Mind's Eye, but I couldn't see any brainwashing debuffs. Perhaps he thought he had made a mistake because he looked like he wanted to erase his confession about being a regressor.

'Why are you acting like nothing happened?'

I felt like he was feeling embarrassed because the other party members were here. This was the thought I had, but when the other party members were gone, his attitude didn't change.

"Are you going to rest today, Mr. Lee Ki-Young?" Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

"No, I… need to check the status of the side quest… and encourage the troops like I normally do. I'm also getting tired of lying in bed all day…" I answered.

"What about Hyo-Yeol oppa?" Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

"I don't think he has any other plans… so I think it might be best if he accompanies me…" I replied.

'You'll go with me, right?'

He wasn't saying anything, so he had to have agreed to accompany me, but…

“Mr. Hyo-Yeol… about yesterday…” I said.

“*Hmph.*”

If I showed even the slightest hint of bringing up what happened last night, he wouldn’t say anything. There was this unspoken pressure not to mention it. My plan to increase our synchronization rate with his regression confession event had gone down the drain.

‘Actually, maybe there is some progress.’

The method was kind of strange, but the fact that he brought it up first was progress.

In addition…

‘What the? I think… our synchronization has improved.’

I wasn’t mistaken. When I quietly triggered a fake story, I felt something a bit different from before. Unlike before, when I could only see fragmented scenes, I could clearly feel his senses.

He had to have felt that something was off because he examined himself.

“What did you do?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“I think our bond has strengthened a bit,” I answered.

“*Hmm…* come to think of it, I never asked about that power of yours. What is it?” Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

“I don’t really know either, and it doesn’t show on my status window. Considering the circumstances, I think it’s probably a power above the law of the system, but…” I paused.

“Is this something you can do with others?” Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

“No, you’re the only person I can do this with. As you already know, I did something similar to Mr. William, but that was different from this. I never imagined that I could do something like this. *Ah!* Also… I decided to call it Soul Binding,” I replied.

“Soul Binding?” he asked.

“Yes. I mean, it’s not wrong,” I said.

‘The wording is important.’

The words “Soul Binding” suggested that there was a special bond between us.

“I’m sure you’ll understand it. It’s like you instantly understand what I want and the path I’m looking at. It’s like our souls are connected… It’s not just for you, but for me as well. At first, we could only share fragmented scenes from our point of view, but…” I paused.

“*Hmph.*”

“I think we can finally share our senses as well. I can’t help but think it’s a gift from the will that led me to Rohen—”

“Wait. You said you came here to help me, right?” Woo Hyo-Yeol interrupted me.

“That’s right,” I answered.

‘I’m the only one who’s been talking. He’s starting to make me feel really angry.’

“I don’t… really know the details either, and I can’t really remember much… but I know it’s something I must do,” I told him.

“What did you say?” Woo Hyo-Yeol questioned.

“I knew from the beginning that I had to help you. I knew instinctively that

was the reason I was brought here. Despite the fact that no one taught me… or informed me about it… I even thought maybe the GENIUSES were behind it, but…" I paused.

"…"

"I have a feeling… that might not be the case. Come to think of it… Mr. Hyo-Yeol… last night, you said something important—"

"I don't want to talk about me," Woo Hyo-Yeol interrupted.

'This jerk is the biggest asshole.'

It was like he was ignoring me.

He kept ending the conversation, so the topic had to be a difficult one for him to discuss.

He wasn't as bad as Kim Hyun-Sung, who constantly apologized, but there were parts he definitely didn't want to talk about because he continued behaving that way.

I felt like he was worried that he would hear something he never wanted to hear, but it was unlike him to act that way.

Perhaps he was trying to make sure that our bond wouldn't break.

'If that's not the case, there's no reason for him to avoid it like this.'

He was drawn in by the words like "trust and faith." It was to the extent that he revealed a part of himself, but there was still a part of him that subconsciously felt that something was off.

In short, the reason he wanted to avoid talking about it was that he didn't want to know the truth. It was like he wanted to completely block out the possibility of reaching the bad ending.

However, this was the best-case scenario for me. From a less generous angle, it could be nothing more than Woo Hyo-Yeol being fickle, which, of course, made me feel uncomfortable.

'Actually, the latter seems more likely.'

Based on his actions so far…

'Maybe he's just too lazy to explain it.'

Since he had never really been good at explaining himself.

Anyway, Woo Hyo-Yeol and I were carrying out tasks that weren't really considered tasks. It was time to encourage the troops or discuss the plans for the next step.

As soon as I came back to my senses, I heard a voice. "Miss Jung Ha-Yan and Miss Han Sora are almost done removing the barrier to the Cursed Elf Queen's Garden. They'll probably be done in the afternoon or tomorrow…"

"I see," I said.

"We received news that the reconnaissance team has found a new path, but…"

"If the report is accurate, does that mean we can pass through the Shadow Corridor?" I asked.

"That's right."

"All right. What does everyone else think about this? Passing through the Shadow Corridor…" I asked.

"May we first ask for your opinion, Saint Lee Ki-Young?"

'Honestly… '

If the expedition team had formidable stats, then there was no reason for us to avoid it.

'It is dangerous to take on the corridor that branches out into hundreds of paths... '

"..."

'I don't think the rewards are going to be good either... '

We successfully made a safe zone in the lower floors… but there was no guarantee that we could create a camp like this in the upper floors. The right decision was to save as much energy as possible before heading up there.

Moreover, Shadow Assassin Lian sounded like a weak named NPC.

It was the perfect place for a messy, chaotic fight, and like any weak named NPC, Lian probably had an annoying mechanic. It was probably best to say that it'd be tiring rather than difficult.

From the way the detour was set up, the Demon King's Castle had named beings we didn't necessarily have to fight, but…

'We still need more experience.'

"It's not something that can be easily decided… unless we can confirm that the detour is safe. Even if we have to go around, I think passing the Shadow Corridor is the right choice," I told them.

"Understood."

"Then what is our next destination?"

"It'll probably be the Cursed Elf Queen Elena's Inner Garden. I'll need to take a closer look, but I believe it'll be easier to clear than the Collection Manager," I answered.

“I see.”

“The next part is the issue. It’s the Mad Council where we have to face the remaining three at once. They are going to be the hardest named beings to tackle before we face the Demon King,” I told them.

‘That’s why we need to raise our stats… ‘

That was the reason I accepted the side quest.

“Then, when are you planning on leaving?”

“I’m coordinating the departure to match the opening of the barrier. Unless something unexpected happens, I’m planning on leaving in two days, so please ready the troops by then,” I ordered.

“Okay.”

“Understood.”

The slightly longer meeting finally ended later that night. The expedition team, which had left to rescue Lee Chang-Ryeol, returned the next morning.

‘I wonder if this jerk is going to pretend not to know anything today, too.’

Just then, I felt pain in one of my eyes.

I checked the mirror and saw that my eye was gleaming with a golden light.

And then…

“What the hell… Shit… What the heck…”

All I did was blink, but it was nighttime again.

To my disbelief… an entire day’s worth of memories had inexplicably vanished.

“What the hell is going on…” I mumbled.

CHAPTER 1198
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (18)

I wasn't imagining it, and I wasn't dreaming, either.

When I came back to my senses, my surroundings became dark, and time flowed in an instant to catch up to the present time.

In terms of time, the gap was roughly eleven hours.

I was shocked by the bizarre phenomenon, but as always, it didn't take me long to assess the situation. It was pretty obvious that this was happening for a reason. I couldn't tell whether the puzzle pieces were falling in place, but obviously, something was going on behind the scenes.

I could clearly remember my eyes emanating a golden light before my memories vanished.

'It's not like I was unconscious either.'

I was in a different place, and my outfit had changed as well.

I was also not sprawled out on the bed, so it was reasonable for me to assume that I was carrying on as usual. I wasn't sure if I was remotely controlled or if there was actually something inside me, but one thing I was sure of was that someone had taken control of me.

Naturally, I was the most suspicious of Lee Ki-Young, and based on the situation, I assumed it was the handiwork of the real Lee Ki-Young. There was probably a clash between the two real ones. I believed "two,' as it was too early to conclude that I was fake.

Anyway, he had definitely taken control of my body.

I couldn't stop him, and he could take control of my body anytime.

'Is there a trigger behind it?'

I couldn't remember doing anything different in the morning. All I did was wake up and look in the mirror, so I hadn't done anything that could trigger this change.

There had to be a reason behind the sudden loss of control.

Naturally, I went inside my room to try to find a hint.

I considered the possibility of there being some kind of message.

'There has to be some kind of explanation.'

I was certain that there would be something here, but I didn't find anything.

"Rude jerk," I mumbled.

Either he wanted to figure out the current situation alone, or he didn't want me to find out about him. Otherwise, perhaps he simply wanted me to suffer. He probably wanted to see me clutching my head and writhing in pain.

Either way, they all made sense.

'I'll head out for now.'

I needed to find out what happened during that time.

'Did everyone get their equipment?'

What I was most curious about was the expedition team that safely completed the side quest, and the agreement I made with Yoo Ah-Young. Since the command center was quiet, they were most likely successful.

However, I couldn't help but wonder if they got their equipment.

When I thought about the people who knew my every move, I naturally approached my guards. When I walked outside, I saw a few people looking at me from a distance. They were maintaining their distance, acting as if they weren't there, but they were always prepared to handle any unexpected situation.

They were guards hired by the Flower and Fertility Familia.

"Do you… have a moment?" I asked.

"Yes?"

"So… are you Miss Aleria?" I asked.

"*Ah… ah… ah!* Y-Yes!" Aleria answered.

'She sounds like she's buffering.'

"I've been watching you from the very beginning. Your hard work has caught my attention, so if you don't mind, could you come into my room for a moment?" I asked.

"*Ah… huh?* Y-Your room? I can't… possibly… I-I'm currently working…" Aleria stuttered.

"Won't your work be easier if you're closer to me? I just want to talk to you. Please. There's something I want to ask you," I begged.

I was practically begging her with a smile, so it wasn't strange that she couldn't reject my request. I saw her slowly entering my room while blushing furiously. She kept looking around as if there were many things to look at, and I could hear her gulping mouthfuls of her own saliva.

I was sure she was startled to hear herself gulping hard, as she tried her best to stop doing it, but it seemed like her mouth was constantly filling up with saliva. She was obviously really nervous, but I was used to her reaction.

It'd be strange if she weren't nervous.

The Saint of Flower and Fertility was in front of her, after all.

'She has a subtle clumsiness to her.'

"Please sit here," I told her.

"*Huh?* Here?" Aleria asked.

"Yes. Which tea would you like?" I asked.

"I'm okay…" Aleria answered.

"Please pick something," I said.

"I'm really—"

"Since you keep refusing, I'll just pick one and prepare it for you," I interrupted her.

Aleria kept fidgeting with her fingers. She was also worried about the possibility that she smelled bad, as she started sniffing herself.

When our eyes met, her face turned red again.

"You don't have to be embarrassed. It's natural to start sweating while doing your job," I told her.

"*Ah…* o-okay," Aleria stuttered.

"How's work?" I asked.

"…"

"Well, more like how's your life here…" I clarified.

"*Ah…* m-my life here is fine. I have friends here… There's… Kathy from

Arhendel… and a friend named Jonia… They're…"

What was she talking about all of a sudden? Even she had no idea what she was talking about right now. She rambled on while frantically moving her hands, but none of them were worth listening to.

"So… my life here… To sum it up, it's fine. It's always fine, thanks to you, sir!" Aleria said.

"*Ah*… thank you. *Hehe*," I said.

"…"

"…"

Aleria had to have realized that she messed up. It was clear that she wanted to hide somewhere, but sadly, she couldn't run away from here.

She thought that continuing the conversation would make her feel less embarrassed.

"More importantly, sir… what did you want to ask…" she muttered.

"*Ah*, right. I did say that. You've been watching me all day today, right?" I asked.

"Yes, I… did…" Aleria answered.

"Can you tell me what I did today? And in order as well," I requested.

"That's not hard, but… why…" Aleria asked.

"Please don't ask me questions," I told her.

"Is this some kind of test?" Aleria asked.

"No, it's nothing like that. I just need you to tell me," I answered.

Despite telling her that this wasn't a test, she seemed to be thinking that I was testing her competence.

"I'm sorry, but I don't know the exact time… so can I tell you a brief explanation… of what you did today?" Aleria asked.

"Sure," I answered.

"At thirty past eight in the morning, you exited your room," Aleria said.

"Okay."

"Afterward, you had a simple meal at the cafeteria, and then you read various reports while drinking coffee," Aleria said.

'So that jerk had time to drink coffee.'

"You don't have to go into *that* much detail. You can just give me a general description of what I did," I told her.

"*Ah*, okay. I'm sorry. Afterward, you headed to the armory. You had a long conversation with the manager there, and I remember you exchanging and requesting a few more items. I was far away, so I have no idea about what they were, but the manager said that she needed more time…" Aleria revealed.

"*Ah*, I see."

"After that, you headed toward the barrier to the Cursed Elf Queen's Garden," Aleria continued.

"…"

"You discussed the barrier with Jung Ha-Yan. It was around one o'clock in the afternoon," Aleria added.

Basically, I visited Yoo Ah-Young's workshop to either switch or request more

equipment. Then, I played a quiz game with Jung Ha-Yan.

'Was there equipment I needed?'

I was sure I wrote down a separate equipment list, so I could just check that later. He could have discovered something I missed. He probably hadn't interfered with the overall development path of Woo Hyo-Yeol, William, and the key named individuals.

Otherwise, I'd say that he was blind.

I ignored Aleria and quietly took out a ledger. With a quick glance, I noticed new items on the list. I figured these items would help with boosting our strength, but he had to have thought that it wasn't enough, as he took control of me to alter things.

As expected, he didn't change Woo Hyo-Yeol's equipment…

'But he changed William's.'

Even that wasn't enough.

I thought Agility wasn't a necessary stat for William, but he obviously disagreed. He had to have thought that William's Agility needed to be increased in order for him to be able to face Kim Hyun-Sung.

It was a bit different from my approach because I planned on using buffs to make up for William's Agility. His plan considered the cooldown times of the buffs as well as the possibility that the priests could get annihilated during the raid.

'Next… '

Of course, the fact that he met Jung Ha-Yan bothered me. I wasn't sure if it was because he hadn't spent time with her in a while or if there was a message he needed to deliver to her.

There was also a chance that he simply wanted her to get rid of the barrier as soon as possible.

Anyway, thanks to Aleria, I obtained enough information to reach a conclusion.

“And then… you called for a meeting. That was around ten past two in the afternoon. I have no idea what was discussed during the meeting—”

“Did you really not hear anything?” I interrupted her.

“Yes, but I have an idea as to what the meeting was about. After the meeting, I heard news that we were going to bypass the Shadow Corridor,” Aleria answered.

“…”

“…”

“Really?” I asked.

“Yes.”

He was trying to move things forward faster. It was too early to make a decision, but it was worth thinking about it. Perhaps he thought that I was moving too cautiously.

Since he had decided to bypass the Shadow Corridor and play a quiz game with Jung Ha-Yan, he was obviously trying to accelerate the schedule.

I wasn’t sure if he found his time in Rohen too long or if he had just grown tired of everything, but he wanted to reach the end as soon as possible.

‘Maybe he’s trying to tell me that it won’t hurt to move a little faster.’

Lee Ki-Young wasn’t impatient. Rather than moving hastily, he enjoyed taking his time and making sure that the puzzle pieces fit perfectly.

Regardless of the reason behind his decision, he thought that we were ready to the point that we could ignore the Experience Points that Assassin Lian would surely bestow upon us.

“Could I hear the rest of the story while we walk?” I asked.

“Of course,” Aleria answered.

As I walked around the barracks with Aleria, I noticed people preparing for the expedition. Some of the members from the reconnaissance team were being assembled separately, so it became clear to me that they wanted to inspect the detour route once more.

No matter how many times they checked the route, it would never be enough, but they refused to stop checking things.

“Can you tell me what I did next?” I asked.

“And then…” Aleria paused.

“Yes?”

“At five in the afternoon, you spent time with Mr. Woo Hyo-Yeol,” Aleria continued.

“…”

“You ordered us not to let anyone near the two of you. I also don’t know the details of your conversation, but it seemed like you two were discussing something important,” Aleria added.

‘What the? What did they talk about without me?’

“After about three hours, you walked outside, and I remember you taking a walk at night. I don’t know what you two were talking about, but you were crying,” Aleria said.

“I’m sorry?”

‘Wait, why did I cry?’

“Mr. Woo Hyo-Yeol looked like he was trying to comfort you…” Aleria added.

‘That scumbag wanted to comfort me?’

I had no idea what was going on, but it sounded like that jerk… had decided to film a movie.

CHAPTER 1199
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (19)

The plot was still unclear, but the fact that Lee Ki-Young had gone out of his way to find Woo Hyo-Yeol suggested that the plot wasn't an ordinary one.

'This is ridiculous.'

Based on the situation, I couldn't help but think that they talked about something pretty serious. Judging by the timing when he took over my body, it was highly likely that they discussed his regression.

However, Woo Hyo-Yeol's lips were sealed shut when it came to talking about him being a regressor, so it just made things even more confusing.

What kind of cunning technique had he used to persuade Woo Hyo-Yeol to lower his guard? What kind of movie had they filmed that things changed so drastically?

The situation was pretty shocking to me, as I had been trying to change Woo Hyo-Yeol since I was summoned here.

After raising him like he was something valuable, it was natural for me to feel as if someone else had suddenly taken him away from me. If I had to give an example, it was like someone had stolen my strawberry sitting on top of my cake.

'What the hell were they talking about for so damn long?'

Wait, was there even any progress?

Above all, what surprised me was that Woo Hyo-Yeol had agreed to talk to him for *that* long.

“Excuse me… sir. Are you okay?” Aleria asked.

“*Huh?* I…” I mumbled.

“You don’t look so good… If you’re feeling unwell—”

“No, it’s not that. I was just thinking about something, so you don’t need to worry. Anyway, about what happened next…” I paused.

“…”

“Did anything happen after that?” I asked.

“*Ah!* That’s right. After you entered your room, you called for me,” Aleria answered.

“*Ah…* I see,” I mumbled.

“Did that help you… If there’s anything else you’d like to ask…” Aleria asked.

“No, that’s all I wanted to know. Thank you for helping me,” I answered.

“I should be the one thanking you. I-It was such an honor talking to you, even if our conversation was short…” Aleria said.

“Also, I’m telling you this just in case, but please don’t tell anyone about our conversation today, including Mr. William,” I told her.

“What? Understood,” Aleria said.

“Please don’t tell anyone,” I added.

“…”

“…”

“Yes, sir.”

For some reason, I had a feeling that she wasn't going to keep her promise.

'I should send her away after giving her a little treat.'

"You probably won't understand it, but it's really important to me. I beg you…" I said.

I hugged her lightly and even patted her back. Besides the fact that she stiffened out of nervousness, it was a pretty profitable fan meeting. I learned about the overall timeline and had an idea about what Lee Ki-Young wanted. I didn't even need to review the information because what he wanted was to clear the Demon King of Sunset's Castle as fast as possible.

He had offered a few helpful paths, but his ultimate objective was that one thing.

'Although I'm not sure why he showed himself… '

From that, I concluded that I wasn't his puppet, and it was honestly the best conclusion. Lee Ki-Young and Flower Ki-Young's personalities were clearly separate. It was a relief, as I was worried that his subconscious was controlling me.

I assumed he could take control of my body, but he couldn't reach my mind. If he could really take control of my mind, then there would be no reason for him to take control of my body.

'This could be a trap, but I'm not certain… '

Lee Ki-Young didn't seem like the type to set up traps like this. Actually, he had no reason to set up traps like this. By revealing his presence to me, he sacrificed a tremendous amount of advantage.

It would be better to lean toward the interpretation that his relationship with me was a partnership, not a rivalry.

I had no idea whether I was a version detached from Lee Ki-Young or if I was

a program created to trick the GENIUSES in this place, but as long as I saw myself as Lee Ki-Young, my short-term goals remained the same.

Clear the Demon King of Sunset's Castle and save Rohen…

The situation was a bit different from when I was struggling over the Lee Ki-Young issue.

"…"

"…"

'Should I take this as a message that we should work together?'

It didn't really matter, but I was happy by the fact that a few of my questions were answered.

First of all, I wasn't inside a homunculus, which was the reason Kim Hyun-Sung didn't find anything strange about my body.

If Flower Ki-Young's consciousness were created based on Dummy Ki-Young, it would be like playing a mad scientist creating a new consciousness to instill into a new body, but now that I thought about it, that wasn't really an issue.

'It's not a big deal.'

If my consciousness could be controlled and separated at any time, then making use of Dummy Ki-Young or First Ki-Young wasn't a problem. He'd probably even think that it would be safer than separating his own consciousness.

'Should I visit Woo Hyo-Yeol first?'

Would it be a good idea to hear what happened? I was just thinking about it, but I was already preparing to leave.

It was late, but it wasn't time for him to sleep just yet, and most importantly, that jerk would likely feign ignorance tomorrow. He was probably feeling emotional at the moment, so striking while the iron was hot—visiting him tonight was the right choice.

I left quickly and searched the places Woo Hyo-Yeol normally visited to waste some time, but I couldn't see him there. However, I found Lim Chae-Ryeong wandering around the camp.

"Miss Chae-Ryeong," I said.

"Mr. Lee Ki-Young! Where are you headed?" Lim Chae-Ryeong asked.

"Do you know where Mr. Hyo-Yeol is?" I asked.

"I'm not sure. Did something happen? I can—"

"No, it's nothing like that…" I answered.

"I did see him earlier. He was looking around with a serious face. I talked to him, but he didn't answer me. I even yelled at him, but he just ignored me and left. I'm suddenly getting mad just thinking about it. He's really rude," Lim Chae-Ryeong complained.

"Do you know which way he went?" I asked.

"That way," Lim Chae-Ryeong answered.

"I'm sorry, Miss Chae-Ryeong. I'll be leaving first," I told her.

"*Ah!* Sir!" Lim Chae-Ryeong called out.

'Where did he go?'

I thought it wouldn't take me long to find him since the safe zone was tiny, but I couldn't find any traces of him. When I followed Lim Chae-Ryeong's directions, I finally saw Woo Hyo-Yeol striking a cool pose all by himself in a

secluded area.

He was leaning against a giant pole, staring off into the distance. Perhaps it was just me, but he looked unusually melancholy today. It wasn't like Woo Hyo-Yeol to be lost in thought.

'He's still the same.'

I was sure he had already sensed that I was nearby.

Despite that, he was still looking into the distance.

"Mr. Hyo-Yeol?" I said.

"…" "Mr. Hyo-Yeol," I repeated.

When I called him out a little louder, I immediately heard his voice.

"What is it?"

"Well… I…"

"If you don't have any business with me, I suggest you stop snooping around and leave," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

'What the heck?'

"…"

"I'm telling you this because it's cold," Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

Perhaps I was just imagining it, but he sounded a little kinder.

'No, he clearly has become more warm-hearted.'

It had been a while since his gaze showed any signs of friendliness, but it seemed like he had become friendlier than before. His gaze and voice had become softer, and I could feel him being considerate of me.

'If I ask him what happened today, I'm sure he'll make a big deal out of it.'

Rather than just asking him what happened, I felt like it was better to ease into it first…

"Mr. Hyo-Yeol… about today…"

I was sure his reaction would tell me a lot…

"I thought we were done talking," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

"Well…"

"I'm sure I told you that I didn't want to talk about it anymore," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

'I want to know too, damn it. What did you two talk about?'

"It wasn't like me to be so talkative, and I've become emotional for no good reason," Woo Hyo-Yeol continued.

'Wait.'

"Of course, I'm not saying that I regret it," Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

"…"

"It wasn't like me… to get upset about what you said. I just rejected what you said. All this time, I thought it was comfortable to work alone… but traveling together like this isn't so bad either," Woo Hyo-Yeol explained.

Based on the situation, he was talking about his first life. Were they talking about the reason Woo Hyo-Yeol had started working alone? They probably talked about the fate he faced and the kind of life he lived in his past life.

"I admit that you changed me," Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

'What the hell is going on?'

“But only a little bit,” Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

“Mr. Hyo-Yeol,” I said.

“Stop. I get what you’re trying to say, but I can’t change everything in a single moment. I’m still me,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

‘That’s why I’m asking what the hell is going on.’

“I’m not saying that I won’t try… but there are things I just can’t change. Changing my inherent nature isn’t easy,” Woo Hyo-Yeol continued.

Had he gotten smacked by the hard truth or something? Strangely, he looked defeated. For some reason, I had a feeling that it wasn’t going to be easy to talk about this again.

He kept expressing that he didn’t want to talk about it anymore, so it wasn’t easy to pressure him into talking about it.

“Also… I’m sorry about today. I know you already said that you forgave me, but I want you to accept my apology again,” Woo Hyo-Yeol said.

‘What did you do?’

“…”

“…”

“Sure. I’ll… accept your apology,” I said.

I assumed there was some kind of argument related to his regression or the party, and he probably made some kind of mistake. He had to have done or said something that even he thought was a bit too much, and Lee Ki-Young used that to his advantage to take control of the conversation.

In the end, Woo Hyo-Yeol’s wall shattered, and Lee Ki-Young got what he wanted.

It was only natural for them to talk about many things. They probably had honest conversations, which was unlike Woo Hyo-Yeol, and he probably revealed his deepest feelings, which he would only do once every blue moon.

They probably shared a few deep moments, shed some tears, talked about things they had been holding onto, and sympathized with each other. In Woo Hyo-Yeol's eyes, the entire thing was probably a continuous string of confusion.

His values were also being affected, so…

'So that's why he's more emotional than usual.'

He was probably reflecting on himself.

Of course, I couldn't say for sure that he would change and that the conversation would have a positive influence on Woo Hyo-Yeol, but…

'If he ends up alone because of this, he'll fall apart mentally… '

He was growing.

It was good for me, but…

'It puts me in a bad mood.'

Strangely, I felt something boiling inside me.

'This was supposed to be my work.'

The same thought repeated in my head.

If I were to assume that my consciousness wasn't from Lee Ki-Young and was created, or more like programmed, it would make sense that I got the chills.

If everything, including the bond I had with Kim Hyun-Sung, was fake…

If all the emotions I had for the Blue Guild were fabricated…

‘This is the only thing I have left.’

This was the only thing Flower Ki-Young had left. When I realized that, it felt like a third party had ruined the piece I had been diligently working on.

CHAPTER 1200
THE DEMON KING OF SUNSET'S CASTLE (20)

It felt like a third party had ruined the piece I had been diligently working on.

"What else did I do wrong?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

"…"

"I already apologized several times," Woo Hyo-Yeol added.

I definitely looked unhappy. I noticed that he looked frustrated, but a wave of unpleasantness spread throughout me like spilled paint. I was so displeased that I couldn't even pay attention to his reaction.

"…"

"Equipment," I said.

"What?"

"I think it's best if we set up your equipment again," I suggested.

"Why all of a sudden?" Woo Hyo-Yeol asked.

There wouldn't be that big of a difference in the equipment department, but it felt like his equipment was tainted. I knew this was pointless, and I knew Lee Ki-Young's choice was a reasonable one, but I couldn't withstand the annoyance within me.

In some ways, he provoked me. I had no idea whether that was his intention or not, he could have at least considered that his actions would put me in a bad mood.

I was sure he didn't want anything tainting his artwork as well.

This was no different from the crazy crow incident, so he obviously knew that I would be in a bad mood.

'What the hell does he want me to do?'

There were two instances that could be interpreted as blatant provocations, crossing boundaries that ought to have been expected. I was sure he was aware of that as well, so the fact that he still proceeded with it could only mean either one of these two assumptions—his goal was to provoke me, or he never treated me as his equal.

If any of them was correct, then I would understand why he acted this way.

It was an undeniable fact that we were partners moving forward, but there was a big difference between equals and a subordinate. If he simply considered me as a mere subordinate.

'He believes that I won't be able to do anything… '

If he believed that I had no choice but to move according to his planned timeline, then there was no reason for him to be considerate of me. The changes I could make were very small, and even if I strayed from his planned timeline, he was sure that he could put me back on track.

I expected this from the beginning… but there was still a bitter taste in my mouth.

Actually, more importantly…

'Was this his objective?'

Had he wanted to remind me again… that the only thing I could have was Rohen?

"I'm going to turn in for the night," I said.

“What? You…” Woo Hyo-Yeol paused.

“…”

“…”

I ignored Woo Hyo-Yeol, who stared at me, and looked at the mirror again. I had to be kind of upset because my face was red, and of course, nothing dramatic happened, like one of my eyes changing or anything.

“Come out,” I mumbled.

“…”

“Come out, you bastard! Stop watching!” I shouted.

I knew I wasn’t going to get any answer. If I wanted to get an answer from him, I would have done this a long time ago. I couldn’t help but become increasingly angry, as his actions were so cruel that it felt like he was just doing this to make me suffer.

And that was when I noticed Jung Ha-Yan staring at me…

“…”

“…”

She was watching me quietly while sitting in a corner.

‘They met, right?’

I wondered what they talked about. I wanted to ask, but it felt like there was something stuck in my throat, preventing me from talking.

Then, I heard her mutter, “We have to go on the expedition… no matter what.”

“What?” I asked.

“We… have to. D-D-Don’t delay it… over something so trivial…” Jung Ha-Yan mumbled.

“…”

I was so confused that I couldn’t endure it. I left the room, leaving Jung Ha-Yan behind. When I wandered around the camp mindlessly, I saw the party members together.

Woo Hyo-Yeol was talking to Lim Chae-Ryeong, but I didn’t know what they were talking about…

‘He wanted to remind me of this.’

I couldn’t help but think that way. Lee Ki-Young probably wasn’t interested in this place.

It was highly likely that he couldn’t care less about how they were doing or what kind of outcome they would face. He wasn’t the one building a bond with them. Whether Flower Ki-Young’s persona was real or not, the thought that this persona was most likely created as an emotional wastebasket really struck me.

I had no idea if he thought building a relationship in Rohen was worthless, or if he planted a new person to ruin the contract. There was also a chance that he was trying to handle things more efficiently, but at least, his thoughts were somewhat correct.

I couldn’t abandon Rohen.

The moment I thought that this place was the only thing I had left, the crazy asshole started obsessing over it.

Perhaps it’d be better if I were to talk to Ji-Hye noona.

Of course, I wasn’t expecting an answer because I knew she wasn’t going to give me a straight answer. Despite that, the desire to talk to Lee Ji-Hye was

probably Lee Ki-Young's habit.

Whenever something happened, Lee Ki-Young always solved his problems while talking to her. Despite knowing that she was poison that I ought to avoid…

"Noona," I said.

—…

"Ji-Hye noona?"

I still looked for her, even though I had no idea what to say to her.

— What is it?

"No… it's nothing," I said.

— What the heck? That's boring.

'Should I tell her?'

"It's nothing…" I mumbled.

— Have you been taking pills or something? You've really been acting strange recently.

"Noona," I said.

I felt like I was walking on a tightrope.

"Have I contacted you today?" I asked cautiously.

— What are you asking all of a sudden?

"I'm asking if I contacted you today. Is that hard to answer?" I questioned.

— You're saying strange things again. What's going on all of a sudden? I

thought things were going well over there.

“Ji-Hye noona, Right now… I’m feeling kind of strange, and that’s why I’m asking,” I told her.

— I’m always on your side, oppa. You’re acting really strange. Let’s go for a consultation once this is all over. Actually, where are you right now? Should I go to you? Do you want to meet up?

“…”

— I told you not to be so stressed out.

“…”

— Haven’t I told you to just focus on your task? You’re receiving a lot of support, and the raid is going smoothly, so what’s the issue?

I was feeling frustrated. Despite knowing that I couldn’t be doing this, I couldn’t stop myself from saying the things on my mind.

“Noona,” I said.

‘Don’t tell her… ‘

‘Don’t ask. Don’t ask anything and just accept it.’

I knew hanging up now was the right thing to do, but…

“Am I…” I trailed off.

‘Don’t tell her.’

“Am I the real Lee Ki-Young?” I asked.

—…

“…”

— Haa…

‘Damn it.’

I closed my mouth quickly, but it was already too late. The sudden silence felt heavy. The moment I uttered the questions I had been wanting to ask and relayed the issues I had been keeping to myself, it felt like I had vented out my frustrations.

However, I was immediately engulfed by a powerful wave of anxiety.

- Should I cancel the expedition? Your condition seems pretty bad. I think it’s best if you leave for a bit. I never imagined you were this stressed… It looks like you’ve been overdoing it.

“…”

— To be honest, what happens to Rohen doesn’t really matter to both of us. We may stray a bit from the plan… and there might be some losses… but they’re things we can recover from pretty quickly. It might impact the management of the continent, but that’s not as important as your mental health.

“That’s…”

— The contract is the problem… but… if we just leave it alone, Rohen will get destroyed in the end. If we stall for a few decades, it’ll collapse on its own… and we have no responsibility to uphold the contract.

“You know it’s not that simple. This contract is tied to the system…” I reminded her.

— There’s always a solution. If things don’t work out, we can contact the higher-ups or the demons to intercept… and the penalty for breach of contract? The amount is quite a lot, but—to be honest… it’s a pretty big amount… But the situation isn’t so serious that we can’t handle it, so why don’t we just let it go?

“What are you saying?” I asked.

— It’s none of our business what happens to the people of Rohen, so let’s just forget about this place.

It sounded like a threat, but I could never…

‘I can never give up… ‘

Actually, it wasn’t a problem. Although we were bound by a contract, if Flower Ki-Young was the one who signed it, then the contract was never established from the start.

The contract was the main reason they decided to make use of a new person—or rather, a spirit. The contract itself was a scam, so he wasn’t worried about the penalty.

The problem was the resources they had already invested in this. As expected, they invested a lot of time and resources. They tended to extract maximum profits even from nothing, so they probably wouldn’t leave until they had recovered their investments.

“Do you know how much time and resources were invested… And you want to give it all up?” I questioned.

— So you do know. But like I said, there’s nothing more important than your health. That’s why you should’ve gotten a consultation when I told you.

But…

‘Just throwing it all away?’

If we were to leave, Rohen would collapse in an instant, and it wasn’t simply because of the summoned demon lords. The rift in Rohen’s dimension was also getting bigger to the point that Woo Hyo-Yeol’s first life seemed like a better life.

Recovering Rohen on his own was nearly impossible.

Actually, it was completely impossible.

“No…” I mumbled.

— What?

“No… I think… I was just exhausted, noona,” I told her.

— Really?

“There aren’t any issues, and the expedition tomorrow will proceed smoothly. So don’t worry too much. I’ll try to finish this as quickly as possible,” I said.

— *Ah*… I’m worried…

“Don’t worry too much. After hearing what you said, it seems like I’ve been pushing it a bit recently… so I’m going to end this as soon as possible,” I told her.

‘Psychotic bastards.’

Those jerks treated Rohen as a place that they could abandon anytime.

I knew this from the beginning, but I realized it once more.

‘An assistant.’

I had no idea how to help and how to get help. The situation I was in was unknown to me as well, but I realized that I needed an assistant. At the very least, I wanted Rohen to survive somehow… and unlike Ji-Hye noona, I knew someone who wanted nothing more than to see Lee Ki-Young suffer.

I had no way of contacting them right now, but contacting them wasn’t a difficult task.

Since Kim Hyun-Sung could see me, it was highly likely that he had some sort of connection with me.

'I… '

"…"

'I'll never compromise.'

Lee Ki-Young knew that truth better than anyone, and—

[That's unfortunate.]

"*Huh?* You…"

[I… never compromise either.]

"Damn it…" I mumbled.

— *Haa…*

"Ji-Hye… noo… na…" I stuttered.

— You're really annoying.

"*Ah…*"

— Looks like this is as far as you can go.

"Wait… Lee Ji-Hye… you…"

— *Ah!* Oppa! How many times has it been already?! I told you that this was going to be a problem! Kasugano stirred up some unnecessary trouble, and… why the hell were you there—wait…

"*Ah… ugh… ah… heh… heh… ack…*"

— This bastard is fuckin' smart! Do you know what would have happened

had I not given him a hint?!

‘What hint… What… I said… to you… hint… ‘

— *Ack*… I’m going to reset it.

And then—

“…”

—there was darkness.

My vision darkened.

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